

























# Tons of Treasure

A TALE OF ADVENTURE AND HONOR

Being a new and improved edition of "The Yellow Snake"

By William Henry Bishop

AUTHOR OF

"Queer People," "Old Mexico and Her Lost Provinces,"  
"Detmold," etc.

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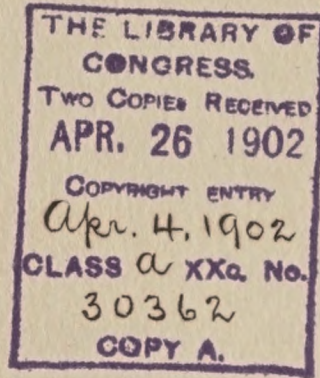


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*Tons of Treasure (The Yellow Snake)*



TO  
EDWARD CARY,

OF THE NEW YORK TIMES, MAN OF LETTERS, STOUT PALADIN  
OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM, AND SECRETARY OF THE  
CENTURY CLUB,

*I beg to dedicate this book in its new and improved form, as witness to a friendship of long—yes, very long—standing. Tons of Treasure it is called, and my feeling is that his merit is worthy of far more than tons, not merely in this air-drawn literary way, but those of the tangible, recognized sort, were it possible to give them.*

WILLIAM HENRY BISHOP.

*Yale University, March 1, 1902.*







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*Not worth ten minutes of your time*  
TONS OF TREASURE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE YOUNG AMERICAN GIRL.

In a small valley, making part of the southern slope of the central table-land of Mexico, lay a sort of earthly paradise, the estate, or hacienda, of General Mariano del Prado.

"Well is this hacienda called Las Delicias—the Place of Delights," said Amy Colebrook. She was writing back an account of the ending of her long journey, to her cherished family in New York.

And "Well is it called Las Delicias," repeated young Walter Arroyo, with particular emphasis, after the arrival of the pretty young American girl above named to make her visit there.

"The house," continues our Amy Colebrook, "stands in the most peculiar of situations. What will you do when I say it is in the crater of a vol-



cano? There, there, don't tremble just yet; wait till you hear the explanation. It is an *extinct* volcano, extinct for some thousand years. The sense of its past terrors but gives a greater zest to the present security.

"We came down to it from great heights," she wrote. "The *diligencia* that brought us from the city of Mexico bumped and shook us terribly, but I forgot all upon the view of this valley. We seemed to hang in mid-air, on the rough pass, and the forms and colors of the glorious prospect below us were all pale and misty, as if in a dream.

"'Cuernavaca!' cried Luz, making out the domes of the town, which lay near a tract of sugar-cane of a more vivid green than the rest.

"Her eyes filled with tears at the sight of this her home, and she fairly broke down and sobbed on her father's shoulder. Never have I felt more warmly toward the child. You know we thought her rather slow and dull at school. The girls at Mrs. Rush's used to ridicule her stupidity, but I felt, even then, that much of it was due to the shyness of separation from her own country and lack of facility in our language. And, indeed, on this long jaunt of ours from New York, she has developed many sweet, attractive qualities. I am sure



Luz (Light)—how unlike the name to her dark type and heavy over-developed figure—has the making of a charming woman in her yet. Lucky for me, was it not, I took this enlightened view of her, or I should never have been here. I am only too delighted to find I was right. Her gratitude for what little affection I showed her is really quite touching. And her father—well, the General is simply the nicest man in the world. He is somewhat stolid and formal at first—you remember his daughter takes after him; but, I assure you, he thinks of nothing but what charming, kind-hearted thing he can do for one next.

“You know my old habit of digression, so don’t expect a straight story from me at this late day. I had meant to tell you about the house first, and then about the people. Well, at a little hamlet, of a few cane and adobe huts, with a ruined church, like an ancient abbey, in the midst, we were met by a cavalcade, consisting of Don Angel, the son of the house, and the dependants of the hacienda, come out to welcome us. Don Angel is a mere boy, perhaps eighteen. The horsemen had dismounted, and were resting under pleasant shade, where Indian women sold oranges and lemons from their own trees, but the moment of our arrival they



leaped into the saddle and dashed along beside us in gallant style. They fired pistols in the air and made other demonstrations of joy that were almost terrifying. Their accoutrements—well, I send you herewith an aspiring attempt of my own in water-colors, to show some costumes of the country. The heavy spurs, the bands around their hats, and the rows of coins down the legs of their trousers are all in silver.

“I can’t get over even the old men’s wearing short jackets: you should see the rotund General in his!

“One of the party, Don Walter Arroyo, looked particularly spirited on horseback. He was only an acquaintance, it appeared, who happened to be there at the time, and came along with the rest. But my attention was drawn away from their eccentricities by our arrival at the *Cerro*. We rode through flowering hedges and shaded lanes, and presently there was the stately, long, low, white mansion before us.

“The *Cerro* is a truncated cone of some three or four hundred feet in height. One side has been torn away, probably by the force of an ancient flow of lava, and discloses to view what was once the crater, but is now a natural bowl of exquisite



verdure, with soft and pleasing slopes. In the centre of this open side, at the top of a gentle rise of ground, receiving the breeze only from the most favored quarters, and sheltered against every inclemency, stands the imposing residence, spacious, sculptured, battlemented, and loop-holed against attack, and with a gabled belfry in which hang two tiers of old bronze bells to summon to chapel or sound tocsins.

“The emerald bowl, perhaps half a mile in diameter, which was once so terrible, is now fertile with crops and gardens, merging near the top into the darker green of rich forest growth, and presents a scene of peculiarly quiet beauty. At one place only is a trace of roughness, in some basaltic cliffs. From a hot spring at their feet waver up thin wreaths of steam. Behind the *Cerro* are tall and savage mountains, of which it is a spur, and up among them, at a great distance, you see the white thread of a water-fall. There was a beautiful light over everything when we drew near, the flocks and herds were coming home, and the bells of the hacienda struck with a musical chiming.

“I marvelled to find this palatial abode set down in the very jaws of destruction as it were. A most intelligent young man—the Mr. Arroyo who had



happened there by accident—rode beside me and explained the character of the site. He spoke English, with a good deal of accent, and was put forward as interpreter by the rest.

“‘There are a great many such hills scattered about here; you will often see them,’ he said. ‘They are probably offshoots of Popocatepetl [the great peak towering snowy white on our far horizon], thrown up by the elemental fires that had begun to abate there. I have not been abroad, but I have heard from travellers that there are plenty of similar hills in Auvergne and near Naples. A king of Naples used to keep his deer in a crater-ring something like the *Cerro*: he had only to close one side with a gate, and his deer-park was complete. And these old volcanic cinder-heaps make the very choicest soil for vineyards and gardens.’

“‘Yes,’ I answered—sighing, I am afraid—‘I have never been abroad, either, but I have heard my father tell of drinking the delicious *Lacryma Christi* wine from the slopes of Vesuvius.’

“So, my dear old family, I had to admit at once that this was my first venture into the great world of travel and romance after which my vagrant spirit so greatly hankers. However, it is an oppor-



tunity that bids fair to make up for all past deprivations. You will think it shocking, but I have hardly had time as yet to be homesick. I am not sure but I am grateful even for the ailments that reconciled you to letting me come home with the kind General and his daughter, to try the effect of their milder climate. I am far better already ; you would hardly know me.

“I stop a dozen times a day and cry out at all this loveliness around me in enforced wonderment, ‘Oh, beautiful ! Oh, beautiful !’

“What a sweet and perfumed air ! What delicious gardens, what terraces and statues, in the old-fashioned style of foreign palaces ! What fishponds with carp, what fountains, what labyrinths, and clipped alleys ! What thickets of laurel and myrtle, with roses and oranges, amid the glossy dark green, like red and golden lamps ! My dear, old, commonplace, poverty-stricken family, how am I ever to like you again ? Have you by any chance an hacienda ten miles wide by twenty long, sloping in such a way that it possesses several different climates all its own, from temperate to torrid, and grows the choicest productions of each ? Have you herds on a thousand hills, and employees like an army ? Have you a *majordomo*, a bookkeeper,



and half a dozen other principal subordinates before the ordinary servants begin? Have you granaries like monumental halls, and buildings that cover in their totality some acres of ground? Very well, then.

“No, you have only a little flat up near Central Park, with perhaps the prettiest portières and blue china in New York, it is true, but still very high in the air, and lacking bedrooms enough for the comfortable accommodation of my numerous brothers and sisters. Ah, but in spite of what I say, I only wish I were there with you this very minute. Not one of you but deserves the pleasure I am having much better than myself. Ah! well, perhaps better things are in store for us yet. Why must people be cruel and unscrupulous? Why could not dishonest trustees have taken some other people’s money instead of ours? Not that I want *anybody’s* to be taken, but there are so many that put money only to vulgar and ostentatious uses. Do you know I often think *we* are just the ones to have it?—disinterested, isn’t it? *We* like nice things, *we* have refined tastes, haven’t we?—I am sure we do more now, with our wretched little makeshifts, to keep up a figure in the world, than many with large incomes. Of course it isn’t so hard for me, because



I have always been used to it, the troubles happened before my time ; but I often think how you, dear mamma, must suffer, who once had everything so very different. Why are there not benevolent rich people to find out the case of nice, deserving families whose money was made away with by faithless trustees, and in some artful way set them on their feet again? That would be true charity. I am sure I should like nothing better than playing the good fairy in that way. Well, well, this is a long way off to write you about matters we have discussed a thousand times at home. You will think your Amy could hardly have gone farther and fared worse, if so overcome by the opulence of her Mexican hosts.

“I asked ‘Don’ Walter Arroyo — their Don means only our Mr., though it always seems as if it ought to mean a great deal more—if we were likely to be blown up some fine day, living so recklessly in the crater of a volcano.

“He answered, smiling at my idea : ‘You see the rather permanent look of things around us, and even Popocatepetl has shown no eruption for thousands of years.’

“‘All the more reason,’ I maintained, for there was an irony in his tone. And really I have only



lately begun to get over breathing hard on this account, and lying awake of nights about it.

“ ‘ You will not deny that such things can happen and have happened ? ’ I went on, more seriously. ‘ Before Vesuvius broke out and swallowed up Pompeii the ancients looked upon it as wholly extinct, never thought of it in any other way. Spartacus was besieged by a Roman army, on a plain that then existed in the top of it. The wonder to me is that people ever get up confidence enough to do anything at all in such insecure places. ’

“ Don Walter Arroyo looked a little surprised at the extent of my reading—as, to tell the truth, I was myself.

“ ‘ These are some of the small risks one takes in life,’ he said, by no means overcome with terror. ‘ And you do the poor earthquakes and volcanoes injustice. They have many good points, after all. ’

“ ‘ Such as what ? ’

“ ‘ They are a vent for the surplus heat, and they keep up the necessary inequalities of the earth’s surface, which otherwise would soon be worn down by the elements as smooth as a billiard-ball. ’

“ ‘ They ought to honor their able defender by special exemptions, if opportunity offers. ’

“ It was a long time since I had teased anybody,



and I felt like practising a little on one who appeared to deserve it.

“He only bowed, in his smiling way, and concluded with this, which I thought quite striking :

“‘For my part, I am not so much surprised at the instability of the earth as its stability. It is one vast net-work of cracks, and it is never quiet, yet the amusing thing is the way men and their works stick on, in spite of its efforts to shake them off. We ride the earth as a *vaquero* rides an obstinate, bucking pony, yet rarely come to grief.’”

To another person, nearly of her own age, a certain Emily Winchester, this sprightly correspondent repeated substantially the same account, dwelling a little more fully on the young man who had looked so particularly well on horseback.

“There is little society, it seems,” she said ; “the places are far apart, and the people have had so many feuds and revolutions. *He* does some kind of surveying for the General : so I suppose he will come back again, and is likely to be one of our visitors. He is really very handsome, and you know your friend Amy likes that. Shall I ever forget our silliness over Montague ? How many of us were there who used to adore his photograph and post ourselves in front seats at his matinées ?



Señor Don Walter Arroyo—I like the solid air of the simple ‘Walter’ added to the romantic surname—is half, or even wholly, American. I don’t understand all the circumstances, but he was brought up by relations, three old maiden ladies, in the next town. They live on a small income, and he looks after some of their property. He has had a scientific education, but I believe does not practise any profession regularly.

“When I say he is handsome I do not mean that there is anything conscious of it or finical about him ; on the contrary, he has a strong, manly air ; there is a certain plainness, if you see what I mean, in all his good looks. Is this enough about a man I have met only once ? What think you, if I marry a Fra Diavolo-sort of husband and settle down here in the tropics ? But what is the use of being girls if we cannot be nonsensical once in a while ? Not that society, to be serious again, is of the least consequence here, for besides this heavenly place, I have all the surrounding hamlets and the little provincial city to explore. The few months of my visit will pass only too quickly. I have not left the hacienda as yet, but to-morrow or next day we go to Cuernavaca. It is about four miles away, and the small village of Campo Florido lies between.”



## CHAPTER II.

### THE YELLOW SNAKE IS HEARD OF.

On the next day but one, in fact, the family drove into town, in their ramshackle conveyance, with two *mozos* riding as servants and guards behind them. It was ramshackle not for want of a better, since they had the most modish of everything in their stables at the capital, but on account of the condition of the roads in a country where most of the travelling was done on horseback.

The del Prados sat in it beaming with an air of benevolent contentment while the various commissions were accomplished. The market-arcades, gay as a scene at the opera, the bizarre figures, the great ruddy water-jars, drew forth the admiration of Amy. For her the most ordinary details of common life were full of interest, the theatre, the hotel, the municipal building, a few soldiers practising on their bugles before it, and particularly some prisoners working on the pavements, under guard, who frightened her.



The *Madre* (Mother), as they call the Señora del Prado—often varying it with the affectionate diminutives of *Madrecita* and *Mamacita*—assisted by her daughter, explained everything. She was an old lady, with bright eyes, a large mouth, iron-gray hair, and, at a first glance, a rather stern look on her dark face; but this was misleading, for there was really no unpleasant sternness about her. She was of a more conservative cast than the General, coming from one of the old aristocratic “*Mochos*” families, and having her sympathies still strongly bound up with them, while her husband—though he too, to be sure, was of as ancient a lineage—was an enlightened member of the party of progress and liberal ideas. Such intermarriages were not infrequent in the country. The feminine conservative notions generally had to give way, though making themselves much felt under the surface.

They stopped at the drug-store, with its colored bottles, the grocer's, with his long rows of white tapers suspended in his door, and then turned down a side street to a little shop where dried rose-leaves and all kinds of dried herbs, medicinal and culinary, were exposed for sale. Just coming out of this shop as they reached it were two women in a garb resembling that of nuns, yet retaining about



it something secular. One of them had a perfectly charming face, young, roseate, demure, draped in a dark shawl heavier than the usual mantilla. The other was middle-aged, plain, raw-boned, an entirely matter-of-fact-looking person.

The Señora del Prado spoke to them very kindly. She made Amy acquainted with them, introducing the younger one as Sister Beatriz, and the other as Sister Praxedis.

“And what brings you to town to-day?” she asked them.

“We have sold some of our embroideries and herbs,” answered Beatriz.

“I am so sorry that we have not room for you in our carriage, that we might drive you home.”

“We do not mind the walk; we are well used to it. Besides, we are not going yet,” said Praxedis. Her eyes wandered to the belfry clock of an old, half-ruined church across the way, beautiful in decay, like a myriad more throughout the land.

“Ah, yes, you go and pray sometimes in the garden of your former convent?”

“But before that we are going to breakfast with the Señoritas Arroyo. Many of our friends are very kind to us,” and they passed on.

“The aunts of Don Walter. There are three of



them ; and also three of these sisters—Doña Catalina is left at home. They consort much together,” said the *Madre*, “The Señoritas Arroyo are good women. They must have been very hard to suit in their youth. Some say their father did not wish them to marry, and used all his influence against it. They have rather spoiled their nephew by want of firmness. He is too wild a colt for them to manage, though he’s a favorite of mine, and has many fine qualities.”

“There is Don Walter himself!” exclaimed Luz, pointing him out.

“Yes, with Captain Francisco Perez again. That man will bring him to no good.”

They saw Walter riding into the street in dusty attire, beside a man much older than himself, who was mounted on a large powerful charger, directing from time to time a number of peons, clad in white cotton, bringing along agricultural implements.

“That man looks like a bandit,” said Amy. “But so did all the others at first : I suppose he is no worse than the rest.”

“He has been,” responded the *Madre*, “and I can’t conceive why Walter associates with him.”

“I’ve seen the time, during my term as gov-



error, when I should have had him shot at a moment's notice, if I could have laid hands upon him," said the General, rousing from his taciturnity to confirm this opinion.

"And now just because he pretended to devote himself to the service of the existing government in the last part of the troubles—it was always one for them and two for himself, I'll warrant—they let him settle down as a respectable ranchero and honored member of society. I declare it's too bad to see him allowed to lead a young man like that astray. There's no telling what mischief they two are up to together."

Don Walter now discovered them, rode forward and greeted them with a fine, deferential, easy air. Señora del Prado shook her finger at him and taxed him with his bad company.

"On the contrary," said he, "I have been away engaged in finishing the survey of the northern boundary of your estate, ever since I saw you last, and I met Captain Perez just here by accident. The General's unexpected return reminded me of my negligence. I should have had the work done before now."

"Then I hold you excused," said the *Madre*, extending her hand to him in a friendly way.



“Shall I do myself the honor of waiting on you to-morrow, to present my report, General?”

“To-morrow if you please; my house is always yours.”

Don Walter, before riding away, apologized for his travel-stained appearance. His work had been in rough places, in the thick mountain-forests and along the Barranca of Cimarron, seldom visited. His eyes rested with respectful admiration, which he made efforts to check, upon the fair aspect of Amy, as he talked. He paid her some well-turned compliments, which the most decorously brought up young woman could hardly fail to find pleasant.

“Do not be ensnared by him,” said the General, by way of playful warning; “the blond type of beauty is rare among us, and you can expect here plenty of *floras*. Compliments, literally flowers, will be cheap.”

They stayed awhile at the herb-shop, and then stopped to buy shoes under the sign of “The Boot of Venus,” which consumed a good deal more time.

Meanwhile Don Walter had dismounted at a small new *fonda* or restaurant under the columned portals that ran round the principal square. This place had lately been opened by one Antonio Gas-



sol, a former employee of the hacienda of Las Delicias, as a rival to the *fonda* of the *Bella Union*, at the opposite corner.

"What can you give me for a bite of breakfast?" demanded the customer, sliding easily into a chair by a small table.

The landlord assured him that everything in the earth, air, and sea was at his command, but the best dish ready at the moment was a very fine *puchero*, or general stew.

"Bring it on, then. What news here of late?"

"For one thing, General del Prado has returned from the United States. He drove through the plaza awhile ago."

"Yes, I knew he was back."

"And he has brought with him the handsomest young girl of all the *Norte*—a friend of his daughter's, so some acquaintances at the hacienda tell me. Her hair that falls down her back is as bright as so many sunbeams. My, but she's a beauty! She's prettier than that picture over there."

"*Hombre!*" (Man!) exclaimed Walter, in affected astonishment. The picture referred to was in fact a wretched daub representing the Mexican goddess of liberty, frescoed on the wall back of



the counter, whence pulque, the native beverage, was chiefly dispensed.

"I swear it by my head and the merits of all my defunct relations," cried Antonio Gassol, enthusiastically.

"And how is it with yourself?" pursued the visitor, affably, having heard sufficient on this subject.

"Oh, I? I am having much trouble just now on account of my new sign. I expect the men here every minute to put it up. Are you a good judge in those matters?"

"Oh, so so; perhaps as good as another."

"Well, you see, I want the title of my place to give satisfaction, and it's cost me many a good night's sleep to pick out just the right one. A title may make or mar an inn. I've known it done before."

"And what did you settle upon?"

"*La Alma de México* (the Soul of Mexico). But there are so many others that might have been chosen. How would 'The Ancient Glory of Mexico' strike you? That has a more sonorous sound. Then there was the 'Sun of May;' 'The Spring;' 'The Diana;' 'The Great Mississippi;' 'The——'"



But here the men arrived with the sign, and he broke off, rushing out to meet them. Don Walter, having finished his repast, followed, more at leisure. By that time a little crowd had gathered. General del Prado was passing again. Antonio Gassol ran into the street, challenged his attention, and brought the carriage to the door almost by force.

"Will you do me the great favor, my General," he cried, "to give me your honored opinion? Some of the boys object to my sign. There it is, and a neat bit of work too, if I may say so myself."

"So it is neat, so it is neat," assented the General, with a sort of fatherly interest in the fortunes of his late servant that was pleasant to observe.

"There, you see, boys! I couldn't please you all, could I? I wanted to do what was right and fair all round, you can understand that for yourselves, but I had to make a choice, hadn't I?"

"What is the question at issue, friend Antonio? we shall never get on at this rate," said the General.

"Some of them objected that *La Alma de México* was too old, and that many fondas had that name already."



"They have," spoke a voice from the crowd in a disgusted tone, "there are more than a million *Almas de México* in the country now."

"Ah! that is you, Perfecto Ponce; you are there, are you? You were the principal one. What do you think *he* wanted? Why, that I should take a tradition of the district he and I come from, and call the place 'The Famous Yellow Snake.' He argues that this would be something especially appropriate, as belonging to our own part of the country. *I* say it would bring us bad luck."

"There was a little fonda of that name up at Huetongo that did very well, and you know it. Many's the cup of pulque we've drunk there together. Besides, if there's any evil influence afloat you want to conciliate it, don't you? Politeness is not thrown away, I suppose, even on bad traditions," Perfecto Ponce argued back.

"I don't see where the novelty comes in, then. And in a city something more civilized is needed. But one of you chooses one thing, and another another: even if I agreed with Ponce, the rest would all have their own ideas."

"*I* prefer '*El Demonio*,' or '*El Delirio*,'" spoke up a new voice. "I have known those titles to suc-



ceed finely. They have a bold sound, and give an air of excitement like."

"There, you see——"

But at this moment the *Jefe Político*, an officer corresponding somewhat to a mayor, but with a wider jurisdiction, came up. He was a pompous, self-sufficient, stupid person, and the subject of controversy had to be restated for his ears. He had, in truth, an interest of his own in the Bella Union, opposite, and looked with no favor upon the new enterprise. Nevertheless, feeling the eyes of his fellow-citizens upon him, he assumed a weighty, judicial air, as if considering a case of the most important bearings.

"The point is right here; here is the issue," he began, placing a forefinger in the palm of his hand. "I can tell you absolutely everything. For instance — names were invented in early times — names come down to us from historic ages. All men and nations have made use of them. Very well, then——" And so on and so forth, with a long tissue of the most hopeless, undeniable commonplaces, and even these unfinished.

If the point were indeed in the palm of his fat hand, it stayed there; for he made no further



progress with his argument. The crowd began to show impatience.

"I had many other names," said Gassol, seizing an opportunity eagerly. "There was also 'The Aurora,' 'The Fountain of Love.'"

"Why not 'The Fountain,' pure and simple?" interposed Don Walter, mockingly. "A great future awaits the tavern-keeper who will honestly confess to watering his liquids." And he hummed the words of a popular air—

*"El pulquero que lo intiente  
Mas aqua que pulque vende."*

("The pulque-dealer who understands his business more water than pulque sells.")

The Jefe seemed to take this levity as a kind of offence levelled at himself.

"'Bella Union' is the most excellent of titles for a fonda; you might learn of your neighbors," said he, with the nearest approach to coherence he had yet made.

He strode off to mount his horse, thereupon, but with such rough inadvertence that his heavy spurs struck the naked legs of Trinidad José, one of the *mozos* accompanying the del Prados, and caused that worthy to wince with pain.



"Old fraud! old ruffian!" murmured Trinidad José, looking after him indignantly; "but I know of something that will get me even with you yet."

"Well, now your sign is all nicely painted and put up, isn't it?" said General Del Prado soothingly to Antonio Gassol, and preparing to drive on. "What if it has been heard before and isn't exactly original? A great many people will like it all the better for that."

"There, you see? I told you so," Gassol could be heard saying, behind them.

"What is all this about a Yellow Snake? it seems as if I recollected hearing of it," demanded the General.

"I am the one to apply to—fresh from that locality," responded Walter, who rode again beside the carriage. "The story prevails chiefly among the poor Indian population of charcoal-burners on the way to the desolate Barranca of Cimarron. They believe some ancient deity appears in that gorge under the form of a serpent and brings bad luck to whoever sets eyes upon him."

Señorita Luz crossed herself. Her New York education had not yet wholly changed her simple ways.

"I suppose it is only a vestige of the worship of



the god Quetzalcoatl," Walter continued. "One of his titles was 'The Shining Snake.' He is the god in whose day the cotton used to grow ready dyed in gorgeous hues, and a single ear of corn was provision enough for a family."

"Those people are half idolaters yet," said the General, in a fatigued way, "though they have been Christians three hundred years."

"To be sure they are. They have caves with altars in them that divide their worship with the churches; and how often are idols found in the maguey-fields, to which they furtively pay their devotions?"

"*Dios mio !*" murmured the Señora, piously.

"The secret of keeping up the tradition so long is probably that scarcely anyone has ever been down there to test it; for the place is all but inaccessible," said Walter Arroyo.

The *mozo* Trinidad José, who had worked as near as possible to the conversation, upon this touched his hat respectfully, and ventured :

"I have been there, and I know it is unlucky."

"You have been there—you, Trinidad José?"

"I blundered into it once on a hunting-trip, when I was a young man, from the other end near the lake."



“And what happened to you?”

“Nothing happened to me, but the day after my return the English governess and many of the animals were killed by lightning.”

“Was she governess of *your* family, I’d like to know?”

“No, she was educating the children at the hacienda—you know it very well, General,” returned the *mozo*, reproachfully; “but she died under a tree near my corral.”

The family told Amy about this young Englishwoman. She had arrived and begun her labors but a few weeks before her death, and she was buried under the tree where she had met her fate.

After that subject, Amy asked more about the nun, or half-nun, Beatriz, whose sweet face had interested her.

“You know of course that all of the convents were abolished here?” began Señora del Prado.

“No, I am sorry to say, I did not know it.”

“Not even the Sisters of Charity were exempted. Our odious so-called ‘Laws of Reform——’”

“Lucetta!” expostulated her husband.

“Well, they permit no more than three of these ex-nuns to live together even in secular life,” she continued, more temperately. “Doña Beatriz,



only a novice, just beginning her religious life when this cruel edict was enforced, was one of those thrown out into the heartless world. Two others live with her, at Campo Florido. We do all we can for the poor things," sighing, "and but for our husbands who make the laws—— Well, *amor de Dios !* "

Don Walter Arroyo, after leaving the party, had ridden to his own home in the quiet plazuela of San Ysidro. The two ex-nuns, having breakfasted there, were just coming out as he entered the great green door leading to an inner courtyard.

"Ah, if I had only known what company was here, I should not have been so late," he said, applying even to them the tone of courteous compliment that was natural to him with women.

Doña Praxedis was no doubt beyond the reach of all such blandishments, but the younger, Doña Beatriz, gave him a smile of much favor, and even colored a little.

"We can hardly expect you to arrive at a fixed hour after so long a journey, my dear Walter," said Miss Concepcion, the eldest of the three Arroyo sisters. "And you shall still have your breakfast."

"I have already breakfasted, so as not to put you out."



He went to his chamber, which the kind care of the spinsters had made perhaps the pleasantest in the house, and passed some hours there nervously arranging the notes of his survey and other papers. When he issued forth again, he threw himself at full length upon a settee in the large, cool, brick-floored parlor, and began to talk in a discontented way, that by degrees grew feverish, of his prospects in life.

"I sometimes think it might be a little better if you hunted less with Captain Perez," began Miss Marúca, the second sister, with mild reproach.

"He is the best shot and boldest rider in the district," he answered, as if that were a sufficient response.

"But really such a companionship must have a certain unsettling influence," she pleaded, gently. "It must make you less energetic in business matters."

"Captain Perez is the very best fellow in the world; if others wish to talk against him, I will not hear it. His kindness to me commenced even when I was a poor, friendless little chap, in the gloomy ruin at Rosales; and he has done me many a good turn since."

"And you still remember Rosales so well?" in-



quired Miss Ysabel, the youngest. There was a certain spice of curiosity in her tone.

“How can I ever forget it? Nothing else will ever stamp itself so vividly upon my memory. Do I not know why we lived that way? do I not know why my father fled from the United States and concealed himself there?”

“It was a great misfortune, a great misfortune,” she sighed. “I have always thought your father should never have told you: there was no need of his doing so.”

“Should he have left me to discover it for myself. No, indeed, it was plainly his duty. If he could not put me in a position to redeem the crushing disgrace, he could at least save me from intruding upon the scene of it. Oh, they hissed him there in the streets in New York,” he went on, fiercely. “Some of his victims would have killed him if they could. He told me all—all!”

He groaned aloud as he drifted along with less and less self-control upon a flood of painful recollections to which he rarely committed himself so fully.

“No, no, do not talk so! Why will you recall it? who knows the story here? No one can ever say it was any fault of yours. All will come right



in due time," the listeners expostulated, keenly suffering with him.

"Three millions of money to be made good, and as much more for accrued interest; and all that wrong and suffering to be atoned for before I can stand squarely on my feet like other men!" he exclaimed, summing up all his grief in one final statement.

He was given to alternate moods of brightness and depression, but they had never seen him so downcast as now. The Señorita Concepcion went over to the gloomy figure, who lay with his head deeply buried in the pillows as if to shut out the world, and sat by him a long time, stroking his hair soothingly.

"What a misfortune! What a misfortune!" the three ancient sisters murmured sadly to one another many times that night, as they made their maidenly preparations for slumber.



## CHAPTER III.

### AT LAS DELICIAS.

When Walter arrived at Las Delicias on the morrow he surprised a little scene not quite meant for public view. In the long drawing-room, a noble apartment, furnished in the style of the First Empire, Luz and her younger sisters were trying upon Amy the effect of the graceful mantilla, which in Spanish countries replaces the conventional bonnet. The black lace set off charmingly her bright hair and fell down over a fawn-colored gown which fitted very smoothly her comely waist, rounded shoulders, and arms.

At sight of Walter she would have hastily pulled off the veil ; the others would not have it so, but invited his criticism. Thereupon she resigned herself helplessly, as it were, to their hands.

Walter, still downcast, was quieter than usual. It was the General, coming in also, who lavished most of the compliments.



"She gives our little Mexicans lessons in wearing their own costume," said the General.

They kept Walter to midday breakfast. Gradually his spirits revived.

"After all," he said, "why not enjoy at least the few pleasures fate provides for one?"

The repast over, his papers were spread out upon a table placed in an open corridor around the central court, in which a fountain played. The family gathered there also to hear the reading of the report. One might glance over at the opposite wall, ornamented with patterns like those of the Ducal Palace at Venice, its carved cornice and gargoyles terminating in a strip of blue sky, blue as lapis lazuli, or might catch through the spacious rear portal alluring glimpses of the greenery of the gardens. There was first a wide, sunny parterre, enamelled with flower-beds, mingled thinly with the fragrant lemon and limoncillo. With a tall, clipped hedge began the grateful shade of the gardens proper. "The hacienda," said Amy, "was like those characters which do not display themselves to every comer, but reserve their choicest qualities only for their intimates."

"I find, in conclusion, General, that your line follows the lava-bed to the hither edge of the Bar-



ranca of Cimarron, but does not take in that savage chasm," said Don Walter.

"Are you sure?"

"I have verified the survey very carefully."

"Well, a good riddance to bad rubbish. So even your Yellow Snake does not belong to us after all, eh? it goes to neighbor Garcia, I suppose?"

"Why, no, not to him either. I did the same sort of work for him a couple of years ago, and his boundary stops short of the other side of it. So the space covered by the Barranca, with a little more, is a sort of No Man's Land, to be contended for most likely by the state and general government, if they want it."

"It isn't at all strange: a little land more or less has been of no account here," said the General, explaining to Amy. "I will tell you how the titles were established in this region. A viceroy would ride up to a hill-top with a friend or client and say, 'I give you all the land you can see from here.' Then he would ride up another hill, not far from the first, with another friend, and say to him, 'I give you all the land you can see from here,' or perhaps, 'as far as you can ride in half a day's journey.' Thus, you observe, there was room for overlapping, and some confusion might easily arise."



General del Prado was so well pleased with the result shown him that he desired to have Walter next undertake an accurate plotting of various irregular parcels of cultivated ground and pasture-land on the hacienda. The young man was delighted at the opportunity: nothing could have been more after his own heart.

This employment gave him association with Amy in the freest, most natural way. He often remained over night, and in the evening there was informal dancing in the long parlor, or she played for them the national airs of her country or their own. She commended herself to her hosts by her ready enthusiasm; they were genuinely pleased to hear her declare many things in Mexico much better than in the United States.

"You understand how to make life dignified and stately," she told them, "and that our Americans, with all their expenditure, hardly ever attain."

The leaning to the picturesque and decorative was strongly developed with her. She went about with little sketch-books, in which she put down odd bits, with a most tangible enjoyment to herself.

"It is like living in a picture-land," said she. "Fancy my waking up in a room with a saint and cherubim in the corner, and in a bed standing on a



dais ! Sometimes I get up very early in the morning and climb the staircase to the bells. I like to sit there and look off at the fresh lovely landscape, with the great bell just over my head helping to frame the prospect in. Even the kitchen has a vast hooded chimney and blue tiles. I feel as if something historic or fairy-like must certainly happen to me in this place."

"I can hardly appreciate the novelties you dwell upon, having seen so little else," said Don Walter.

He was led on to question her with interest as to the appearance of things in the United States, about which the recollections of his infancy were exceedingly vague. He was evasive, and checked himself, however, when there seemed any approach toward declaring under what circumstances he had left the great republic of the North.

They rode together a good deal about the hacienda. The ladies of the family sometimes accompanied Walter, and sometimes repaired to meet him, under proper guard, at the curious points—some distant corral, or aqueduct, or an irrigating pond, large enough for a lake, where he was at work. Amy had looked forward to mounting in the saddle—in which she had had but slight experience—with a kind of longing dread, but, the ice



once broken, she made up in courage what she lacked in practice.

Young Walter thought her black English habit, with the high silk hat, from which floated a blue gauze veil like a light smoke, even more delightful than her costumes of every day.

But then to him the latest was always the most delightful.

They two, as Americans—to whom all things are open—were allowed greater freedom than might otherwise have been the case. The family thought good to warn Amy of Don Walter's rather improvident character, and said he would not be a good match, in the pecuniary way, but they were reassured by her quiet smile, and felt that this companionship was harmless. It was only a part of her enjoyable zest in the novelty of Mexico. And besides, their attention was somewhat drawn away from it by a matrimonial prospect of very especial interest to themselves.

The Jefe Político Señor Corcovedo, taken with a fancy for Señorita Luz, young as she was, though he himself was a widower, of more than twice her age, was coming to the hacienda to pay her his court.

“He is too, too ugly, with his odious high cheek-



bones and great yellow teeth, like a gorilla's, and he is stupid and without manners," objected Señorita Luz, aroused on this score at least to plenty of vivacity.

There were stories, too, of repulsive cruelties he had perpetrated in the wars. He was an ignorant, self-made man, who had pushed himself to the front and feathered his nest in the political troubles. Still, he was a person of much consideration; he stood high with the government, being sustained by the favor of prominent persons of the radical wing at Mexico, and General del Prado, on grounds of worldly policy, thought well to give him ample opportunity in his suit, fancying possibly the reluctance of his daughter might yet be overcome. This daughter too—since he was her first suitor, even though a repulsive one—was not so uncivil to him as her words might indicate.

Meanwhile, Amy had not forgotten the sweet-looking nun she had met at Cuernavaca, a figure by whose appearance and unusual history she had been particularly struck. Señora del Prado took her to see the embroideries of the ex-Sisters, and she sometimes returned to them alone. They lived in a pleasant one-story house, of the rural sort, in the hamlet of Campo Florido, not far from the ha-



cienda. Their principal room was large, brick-floored, and cool, and looked out on one side into the grass-grown principal street, and on the other into a charming simple garden.

Amy, whose imagination was easily kindled, said to Beatriz, as she sat there with the latter one day, learning a new lace stitch :

“How charming and peaceful your life is! It seems ideal. I cannot help envying you.”

“I am not to be envied, but very unfortunate. Neither of the world nor wholly out of it,” returned the recluse, sadly ; “its distractions are thrown in upon us here, and I am not always strong enough to withstand them. I often feel myself falling away from a high ideal and growing worse.”

Doña Beatriz returned the liking of the pretty American, so novel an acquaintance for her, and she sometimes came also to the hacienda to repay her visits. The rest were assembled in the corridor there on one occasion just after Beatriz had left them, when the Jefe Político, wholly without tact, and riding rough-shod over the favorite leanings of those whom he was making a pretence to conciliate, began :

“Bah! they’re a fine lot—these mincing, genteelish, high-toned nuns of the order of Santa Rosa,



as well as the others. I'd send them all packing, if I had my way, few or many."

"Señor Corcovedo!" protested the *Madre*, flushing with a strong indignation. This was the day that finally settled his suit. After that Luz would have nothing more to do with him.

"I speak for myself," said the Jefe. "The point is here, immediately here. Well, then, for example—does it not seem so to you? I have many excellent ideas. I discuss all from the point of view of science. In science I can tell you everything, *absolutamente* everything. I have made many orations, as a public official—for example, at banquets—you understand what I mean."

Amy tooted an imaginary trumpet behind him.

"They pull poor faces," he went on, "these women, like the one who has just gone away, but I'll bet the three have the treasure that used to belong to their convent comfortably hidden somewhere. I have had a notion more than once to look it up."

"It was probably taken out of the country by the Mother Superior or others who went abroad," suggested the General.

"I don't believe it—no, sir. I have authority that it was not. Besides, it was too bulky. Why, they had a solid silver railing across their altar,



and golden candlesticks higher than I am and as thick through the body. I say nothing of all the crowns, bracelets, necklaces, and rings, set with precious stones, they had on the images, nor the rain of emeralds, rubies, pearls, and diamonds scattered over their silken garments, nor the solid cash in the treasury. And yet they make the government pay several hundreds of dollars every year to support them."

He was more direct than usual in his talk on such a point as this. Indeed, in matters of greed and persecution, he was not lacking in a rude sort of executive ability, despite his befogged speech.

The Señora del Prado and her daughter had already gone away, to show their displeasure. Don Walter and Amy went to the great gardens, where perhaps their pleasantest hours were spent. They passed along a dusky clipped alley, opening into a sort of pantheon of foliage, in the niches of which stood Flora, Bacchus, and Apollo. The path hence was narrow, and at the end you came out, in surprise, upon a very large oblong fish-pond, with a straight avenue of noble trees leading upward in gentle undulation from the farther end. On one side of the fish-pond were the most ornate flower-gardens; on the other, extending its whole length,



a broad flight of steps with rows of broken columns, and at the top little corner pavilions, which looked down over a miniature gorge or *barranca* without. The couple sat down upon the broad steps, near the water.

“When I first saw all this,” said Amy, “I began to realize the enchanted gardens of Armida.”

In the fish-pond six little formal stone islands served to support choice roses. They were reached by some boats, high-pooped, green and gilded, such, too, as might have suited the gardens of Armida. Nor was all this too carefully kept; it was treated in practical, every-day fashion that but added to its charm. Some of the luscious superabundance of mangos and guavas lay rotting along the terrace walks, and appetizing odors from the corner turrets showed that they were used for the storage of fruit.

Amy had grown round and plump ever since coming to Las Delicias. Her health was better, and she had probably never before looked so well in all her life as now. Her companion, drawn perhaps by some unusual bloom, to-day, ventured to remark the change.

“Yes,” she said, welcoming the reference brightly, “I got Trinidad José to weigh me the



other day, and the result is, after calculating your kilograms into pounds—no easy matter, by the bye—I turn his scales at a good one hundred and forty.”

No Spanish girl would ever have talked to him like that. There was about her an *entrain*, a thorough freedom of character, together with a range of intelligence, to which he had not been used in women. It continually delighted him.

“Oh, dear! I *was* such a thin, forlorn-looking person,” she continued. “I had a cold one spring, which I believe they thought I would never recover from. It is not so very long ago that my brother used to call me the Rag-baby.”

“Rag-baby? I don’t understand.”

“I didn’t think you would. Oh, a nerveless, boneless, limp sort of object, don’t you know? I used to wear a very large white necktie in a bow-knot—it was a fashion just then—and my brother pretended that my head was tied on with it, and would fall off if I pulled out the ends.”

“Mexico has much to commend it, since it has done this for you,” commented Walter.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE HEART OF THE EARTH.

They drifted in their talk to the boorish Jefe Político, and then to a subject his last remarks had naturally called forth.

"The air is full of such stories," said Walter. "According to veracious authorities, our soil is perfectly sown with treasures, from the golden calendar wheels of Guatimozin down to the silver dollars of the latest stage-robber. The rich mines abandoned in the wars are one great resource, the ruined haciendas another; and then all the peasants, having no savings-banks, are in the habit of burying their earnings in the ground, where they forget them when they die."

"It has a fascinating sound. But you speak in the most skeptical way."

"I have had a fair go at those elusive hoards; I will admit that Captain Perez and I have searched for some of them."



"And you don't believe they exist?"

"Oh, I suppose one might, with infinite pains, get a few beggarly thousands. The chances are about as good as in playing in the Havana Lottery. *There* is an opening for destiny to aid a person who very much needs it, but destiny doesn't improve it. I have aspirations," throwing a singular inflection into his tone that was more than mere humor, "for an incredible sum. No mere ordinary riches will do for me."

"Such moderation is really quite astonishing."

"I often go about with a head full of unpractical ideas. I want to go deeper than the deepest mine. Look at the earth below us, dark, massive, untouched, four thousands of miles down: there is a subject to strike the imagination. We have reached to the stars and fathomed the sea, why can we not go down into the earth?"

"Yes, it is impressive, truly; that dark interior seems to me the greatest of all our mysteries."

"We have penetrated perhaps a beggarly half-mile, as against four thousand. I dream of sending electric currents along the mineral veins to melt out their contents, to pierce the central reservoirs of treasure. It is wealth like that that I need; less will hardly suffice."



Amy was pained as by a certain earnestness and genuine greed in these wild, monstrous ideas.

"*Why* do you want so much money?" she asked.

"To rival your Vanderbilts and Astors, your magnates of New York," he answered, turning it off, laughing.

"But is there no way? You are so young yet. If you are discontented here, why not go back to your own country, where opportunities and a career naturally await you?"

"I want an incredible sum; I will never go there without it."

"You do yourself injustice in these ideas," she said, simply.

They got up and walked on to another spot, perhaps the most quaint and curious of all. The princely founder of the hacienda, the father of the present occupant, had stopped at no expensive caprice. He had built beside a warm spring a pavilion of solid blocks and columns of clear glass. This structure was but the better for being somewhat green and broken with time.

"I often come here in the afternoon, and sit in the shade, either within it, or on this bench beside the spring," said Amy; "it is one of my favorite spots."



Nor was it to be wondered at. The very view had an original charm: a vista was cut through the trees, and there spread out a prospect of agreeable solitude, ending in the vast twin snow-crowned peaks.

“Try it now, I beg, in the sun,” said Walter.

His companion, amiably complying, mounted and stood in the centre of the glass pavilion. Opalescent greenish, golden, and silvery gleams fell upon her and glorified the brightness of her hair and the mosaic blue of her eyes. She was like some priestess of light in her temple. There was a mysterious effect about the whole, as of flame burning in the sunshine.

“The basin is a singular one,” said she, coming down. “Sometimes, as I sit beside it, it ebbs or flows before my eyes. I have heard say that its level can be affected even by the human voice.”

“The water comes down from the hot springs above, under the cliffs, but it has much more than their singularities.”

“I have not yet seen those springs: can we go up there?”

They had started, when Trinidad José, detailed to look after that part of the place, came along with a large dog at his heels.



"What is his name?" asked Amy, stopping to give the animal a friendly pat. She had a pleasant word for everybody, and every creature, which had gained her already no small popularity on the estate.

The man, before replying, looked cautiously around, and then at both of them in a searching way.

"Corcovedo," he answered.

"Corcovedo?" repeated Walter, in surprise. "If you despise a man in this country," he explained to Amy, "the most insulting thing you can do is to call an animal after him."

"I wouldn't want it to be known, but that's his name," said the gardener. "Do *you* like the Jefe Político?" he asked Amy.

"No, *I* think him odious."

"Ah, that's it, you don't find him admirable? Well, I think him a devil and the son of a devil: that is why I call my dog after him."

"But he's such a nice dog; it isn't fair."

"I can't help it; it's the only way I have. I just call him Corcovedo to myself a few times every now and then; it does me a world of good. The old scoundrel don't know it; if he did he'd be too strong for me."



While they were still smiling at this simple way of revenging one's self upon an enemy, the young brother, Angel, came up. He had the hobby of chemical experiment at present, and he was in search of Don Walter, to go with him to precisely those upper springs, that they might find among the mineral substances encrusted about the waters some specimens for analysis.

Accordingly, they all went on together, following the little stream, which smoked, over a clear bed, among thickets of luxuriant tropical plants. At the upper level, nature, as usual, had been much supplemented by art. The springs broke out at the foot of a cliff formed of columns like those of Fingal's Cave. A portion of the upper part of the cliff had been rudely carved in the shape of a human face, and had a balustrade and cypresses on the top. The waters, hot and cold, ran out upon a terrace, with heavy ramps and stairway, and were led along to a place where bathing-tanks, discreetly veiled with charming shrubbery, were arranged.

"Here, indeed one may appreciate that he is in a crater," said Walter. "The rock is the denuded wreck of the very heart and nucleus of the old volcano, wind and weather having ground all the rest



to powder. It came up molten hot, and cooled off in these hexagon columns. You find them of all sizes, some as fine as needles."

"And the hot springs have something to do with the internal fires?" inquired Amy, her voice not quite free from anxiety.

"There can't be much doubt of it, considering the peculiarities they present. Or they may be only indirectly connected, through the geysers in the Barranca of Cimarron. The bottom of the Barranca is higher than this point, and possibly they work through. The same formation belongs to the two places; the rent made in the mountains by the Barranca tapers to an infinitesimal crack, very near here."

"And you still persist that you are not afraid? It will probably not be in my time, but when I go away from here I shall look back on you all with a good deal of misgiving."

"What really frightens me," he returned, "is to think you are ever going away."

Angel laughed loudly at her question, and, in haste to be at his work below, began to gather his specimens, flowers of sulphur, white vitriol, sulphide of arsenic, and what not, and left them to themselves.



"You tell me the volcanic lava is still boiling in that remote gorge, and it is still an active crater?" said Amy. "Speaking of treasure, why are not places like that, in which a violent interior turmoil is going on, promising? It seems as if nature would throw out there complete specimens of all she possesses, including her most valuable minerals."

"It's a good striking idea, but it must have been tried—yes, I'm sure it has been tried. My recollection is that, though volcanic districts are favorable generally to the precious metals, the active do not yield anything of consequence."

"Have you ever been down into this gorge?"

"No; and yet I hardly know why, since I have often been at a loss for excitement."

"Excitement!" repeated Amy, taking him to task. "Do you know they give you something of a bad character?" frankly; "they say you have consorted with unprincipled revolutionists, ex-brigands, and the like."

"They mean Captain Perez, of course, and they are wrong," quite good-naturedly. "The General does not like him because they do not belong to the same political faction. I can truthfully say I have never seen anything wrong in Perez. For my



part, I find no great difference in the factions : all alike are ready to tear the country to pieces at an instant's notice. My small experience with revolutions has made me acquainted with a few bold fighters and good sportsmen, that's all. There is no career here, even in the military way. I ask myself, what's the use of trying anything? First one ambitious chief upsets the government, then another. No stability, no certainty. They do promise us peaceful times at present, and railroads are to be built. Perhaps some opportunities will open then, but I think it will be long before we see them, and they will hardly furnish places for all, at the best."

"Then why not go to the United States, I ask you once more?"

"It takes too much money to live there among you American Croesuses."

Such perverse answers tended to confirm unfavorable accounts of him. But then, when have women required that those in whom they interest themselves should first possess all the cardinal virtues?

Seeing a disappointed look on her face, Walter added, as they began to go down, "My aspiration is worthy your approval. A great burden rests upon me."



He was accomplished in woodcraft. One day, of leisure, he made up an expedition to explore the woods of the slope behind the hacienda. He hung in his belt a *machete*, the half-sword, half-sickle of the country, useful to open a path, cut an orange or coffee-stick, or lop an orchid, and led on, with all the children behind him. He had the gift of making himself agreeable to children. Theirs liked to run, to shriek, to pretend to be afraid.

“*Los toros ! los toros !*” (the bulls) they would cry, making imaginary resemblances to the fierce animals in some inoffensive cows or goats. Then they would tear wildly back to his side and grasp his hands, or bury their faces in Luz’s or Amy’s skirts.

Walter pointed out the mahogany-tree, the white camphor, the quinia-bush, and a score of almost equal interest.

“It is like a whole growing drug-store,” said Amy. “How do you know so much about them all? For my part, I am hopelessly ignorant, and it is now too late to learn.”

He did not tell her then that his father—perpetrator of the great defalcation of the day, one that had shaken money markets to their centre—had turned, as a refuge, to such pursuits, and made him



the companion of all his walks, implanting thus a taste which later life had served to confirm. He turned the question aside in an easy way, as he often had occasion to do.

They grouped themselves for luncheon on a large rock, near which a brook ran forth. The children went and waded in the cool water, mingling their laughter with its babbling.

There was one place where broken arrow-heads and fragments of earthenware, remains of the Aztecs, could be picked up. Amy was much pleased to find these antiquities herself, but Walter treated them indifferently, promising her better.

"I shall beg your permission to give you a little image I found awhile ago in the ruins of the temple at Xochichalco," said he. "It is of *chalchihuitl*, the green stone once considered sacred."

"Xochi?—and *chal—chal*?" she stammered.

"The mouths of some charming foreigners are too small to pronounce such long words."

"Oh, *avec ça*! Mine will be large enough to say something pretty severe if you make such absurd speeches."

On the crest of the ascent was found a tall tree, in which was built a seat, reached by steps, for a lookout place. Thence could be seen a part of the



Escorial-like roofs of the hacienda, a glint of statues, and of waters, and the fertile expanse spreading out all around it.

Down the outward slope was, as it were, a field of newly-ploughed earth, which was in fact a vast lava-field, cutting off access to the mountains on that side. Very far away and high up was a glimpse of the white and splintered walls of a chasm. One fancied he saw a film of steam rising from it, such as hovers over Popocatepetl.

"There is the Barranca of Cimarron, and the tradition of the Yellow Snake," said Don Walter, pointing. "Those cliffs are probably three thousand feet high."

"The Yellow Snake again. Did you tell me you had ever seen it?"

"It is rather inaccessible, you know."

"There is so little enterprise in your Mexico. We Americans should, long since, have had a railroad there, and patent-medicine signs painted on the rocks, and a score of very large and bad hotels which would have made you pay roundly for a view of all those wonders. Then you would have seen them."

"But you forget how sparsely settled the country is, the difficulty of getting about; and that it



has by no means always been safe. Few persons would care to make such an excursion. And there must be plenty more places here, too, where man has hardly ever set his foot."

"I am just dying for adventure," persisted Amy, wilfully; "but of course a woman could not go there. What can poor women do?"

"They can inspire men," returned her companion, with a rather determined air.

"Oh, I do not mean—I am not so silly—I only meant—I only like to hear myself talk."

These were the days in which she wrote to her friend, Emily Winchester:

"I seem to be living in a kind of heaven upon earth—everything around me so beautiful, everybody so good to me. I appreciate it with an overflowfulness of heart. All the trouble and sin of the world seem removed to an infinite distance. I can hardly believe they exist."

Don Walter brought her the little green image of which he had spoken. It made a pretty ornament, and she attached it to her watch-guard. Soon after, his labors at the hacienda coming to an end, he disappeared, and was not seen nor heard from again for a considerable time.



## CHAPTER V.

### GOLD, THE SUN OF METALS.

The first proceeding of Don Walter in this absence was to ride away to his *haciendita*—little hacienda—of Cruce Vivo, a small property given him by his guardians, to the end that he might be made more contented through the possession of some estate of his own.

His course lay first through the village of Campo Florido; thence by a *détour* to the right—to avoid the lava-beds, which constitute an almost impassable obstacle on that side—up the long, thickly-wooded slope into the dominant mountain-range. The path, in its early stages, was crossed by occasional fences, with rude gates, which he managed to open without dismounting. A part of it was cut out of the solid rock. There were brooks to be forded, where the swift water ran breast-high on his horse, and places to be climbed and descended more like precipitous stairways than a road. Now and then he saw some mild



Indian Daphnis minding cattle, or a peasant coming down the trail, bending low under heavy burdens of forage or charcoal for market.

He turned off to the right, on a connecting trail, and reached his farm after about half a day's journey. He raised some stock and coffee there, it appeared, but there were no great signs of life about. It was not his purpose to remain; he ordered a servant, a certain Pablo, to collect a few articles he had need of and prepare to accompany him at once.

The man started back in energetic refusal when the objective point was made known, and it was only after the most positive injunctions were laid upon him that he submitted—and then in a sulky way—to go along.

They passed through the hamlet of El Jasmin, with its sacred hermitage, and its inhabitants weaving fabrics of a coarse blue stuff and making a red earthenware pottery. Some of their jars were large enough for Ali Baba's forty thieves. Then they reached Huetongo, a hamlet of more gloomy aspect, the metropolis of a sparse population of charcoal-burners. Here was found, in fact, a "Café and Cantina of the Yellow Snake," a dark, forlorn little interior, with but few customers at



that time of day. It was the most promising place for negotiations, however, and Don Walter left the horses there, and, with great difficulty, secured a guide. A second was afterward employed in addition to the first, who professed to have no great confidence in his ability to point out the way, after all.

"You say neither of you has ever really been in the cañon, and you cannot mention a person who has actually seen the Yellow Snake; then how do you know there is one?" said Walter, arguing in a scoffing way with these men, when they stated their apprehensions. "How do you know it isn't a green dragon or a blue monkey, instead of a yellow snake?"

"No, señor, it is a yellow snake," answered one of them, mournfully.

"Is it the *centoatl*, that shines in the dark? is it the *saltillo*, that leaps at you all of a sudden? Will it devour a man? Come, tell us all about it."

"No, señor," in a tone of pained reproach at this bold scepticism, "it runs away before a man. They say its home is on a rock, and whenever it sees anyone coming it glides swiftly into a boiling-hot fountain."



“Pretty tough, isn’t it, to stand that! And now, if it runs away, why are you afraid of it?”

“It is very bad luck to see it, my patron; that is well known.”

“Oh, there you go again, always the same old story of bad luck. Well, I venture to say we shall have very good luck, all the same.”

With this he dismissed the controversy, which was perhaps having a still further demoralizing effect on his Pablo.

The way abounded in scenes of wild grandeur, growing yet more savage as they progressed, till the mind was divided between admiration and fear. They reached a certain notable cave and paused there briefly. Though but a hundred feet from the path, it might have been passed undetected. Within it were an ancient platform, a heathen altar and image. So noiseless, as it happened, was their approach that they were not discovered by a man within engaged in worship. He was in the act of placing a small copper coin in the mouth of the idol.

“Listen!” said Pablo.

“I suppose you cannot do us any great good; your day is over now,” the poor peon was saying naively to the god—a combination of serpent and



the human figure, both laughable and terrible in its grotesqueness—"but I'll give you a trial, anyway ; I don't want you to do me harm."

At this place one of the guides deserted the expedition. The remaining guide—watched the more closely thereafter—led them on by thick-wooded, devious paths till they soon came to the long-looked-for chasm.

Few could stand without an involuntary shrinking upon that dizzy margin. The Barranca stretched out several miles in length, its remote end hidden from view by a turn in its course. The vast adamantine walls narrowed darkly together at some points, and at others spread apart, affording a view of the bottom, full of smoking springs and *sulfataras*. Portions of the cliff were green with a verdure as of poisonous acids. Some oaks of peculiar toughness clung to the crannies of the rocks ; and down the slopes, such as form the usual glacis at the foot of precipices, could be seen sparse, tall stems of organ-cactus, like spears of the gods hurled from the sky. Steam spouted here and there from the precipitous sides, and occasionally formed a veil, shutting off the whole from sight.

The guide led up, then down, in a very irregular way, and finally brought them to where the path



ended abruptly on a ledge of almost measureless altitudes both above and below. There was absolutely no possibility of going further.

"What does this mean?" demanded Walter, sternly.

The man, changing countenance, replied, confusedly, "I have forgotten the trail."

He could not be made available for any further service. They climbed back again, and then he escaped, like the other.

But Walter, meantime, had had a glimpse of a place, a mile farther on, where his practised eye argued, from the continuous vegetation that found a foothold, that a path descended. A way was hewn thither through the thick forest growth, and he proved to be right. Over almost insuperable obstacles, they at length entered the formidable valley, strewn with the wreck of a volcanic world.

The cyclopean processes of nature, elsewhere discreetly hidden, were here openly at work. The ground smoked from a hundred fumaroles and other vents, and around them the fragments of rocks—granite, sandstones, limestones, and slate, brought up by the resistless force that had torn through them from the lowest depths—were crumbling in whitish flakes under the attack of powerful escaping



gases. A great sunken bowl—which Walter proceeded to call at once La Caldera—burned lurid with molten lava in violent ebullition, and strange lights appeared in crevices of the side-walls, as if the cliffs themselves were on fire. The tall cliffs vanished in a long winding perspective, inspiring awe; here and there stood out from them vast buttress-like projections. Across the blue sky arching above often passed such billowy masses of vapor as if the cañon were the manufactory of the very clouds.

It was nightfall when they reached this place, and they encamped on the spot where they found themselves, under an improvised shelter. Next morning they began their explorations. Pablo—a fat little man of no great character or stability—finding himself fairly inside the gorge and safe enough thus far, seemed less disturbed in mind. They ranged first down toward the lower end, where difficult access was had, through a defile, to a large volcanic lake, without. They passed a night, then turned back to the head, where the monster crags drew together and joined at an obtuse angle.

They passed over mounds of smooth volcanic sand, heaps of scoriæ and ashes, and floods of solidified lava. Strange, hut-like projections, with open-



ings, were met with in the lava, which had once been simply air-bubbles in its tide.

There were not wanting some gay and pleasing effects also. Nothing more joyous could be imagined than a mammoth warm spring in a circular bowl they fell in with on the morning of the second day.

“Look! look! the water is smoking in a basin of snow!” cried Pablo, so surprised that for the moment he forgot his misgivings.

The water, warm like that of the basin at Las Delicias—Walter’s fancy turned toward Amy sitting there—flowed down from the principal receptacle over a succession of terraces, each containing a subsidiary basin. The whole was of travertine, white as the purest marble, formed from the calcareous deposit of the waters.

Don Walter explored this spot thoroughly; it might well be the home of some stately god, and ought by all the probabilities to be the haunt of “the Yellow Snake.” In a random way he rolled some heavy stones into the basin. These, perhaps, choking the mouth of a subterranean vent, produced, as happens in geysers, a formidable ebullition, quite out of proportion to the cause. But nothing whatever appeared that could be construed as supernatural.



Going on, somewhat after mid-day, he came to a curious heap, or cairn, of bowlders, thrown together as by Titanic hands, around which surged a white flood of furiously-heated water. The *mozo*, smitten by a nameless panic, would not approach, and his master, leaving him, went on alone.

The cairn could not be reached at all on most sides, on account of the heat of the water, but, searching round it, he found an accessible point where ran another brook, this, strange to say, of gelid coolness. He clambered up to a sort of platform whence he could overlook all below.

The shadow sides of the rocks were of an almost velvety blackness, but they were touched with vivid light where the sunshine, reflected from the opposite wall of the cañon, fell upon them. The mad-hot torrent disappeared under a large flat rock, slippery with constant spray, as if it had plunged downward into unfathomable depths.

Walter, tired with his work, threw himself down and rested. He fell to musing upon his labors in the Barranca and on what he had hoped to find there. He had broken off specimens of all the rocks, and he had tested all the powders and solid deposits encrusted round the borders of the springs, and had met with no success.



His musings were disturbed after awhile—he hardly knew, in his abstraction, how long a time had passed—by a sense as of something moving under his eye. It was such a sense as one has when a bird or animal stirs in the bushes near us. He aroused himself, and looked down to the slippery flat rock immediately below him. There *was* motion; there *was* life. What an object held his fascinated gaze, and set his heart wildly beating!

A reptilian head had peeped forth. It was round, smooth, yellow; it seemed to have neither eyes nor mouth. The head was gently followed by a body. Slowly, deliberately it came forth. Sinuous and rather slender at first, it gradually gathered bulk; it grew squat and broad. When the whole shape had emerged, it was some three feet in length.

It was a distinctly yellow serpent, without spot or speck of any other color.

“Have I lost my senses?” cried Walter. “Does some misshapen Aztec divinity really exist in this lonely spot, and has he chosen to show himself to me, the greatest of sceptics?”

Sensible, even while this confused fancy passed through his mind, that the phenomenon would be accounted for in some natural way, he could not



free himself nevertheless from a definite awe and dread. Following his first hasty impulse, he detached a fragment of rock to hurl down upon it.

“If it be some rare specimen,” he went on in his cogitations, “why has no naturalist made it the choicest of his treasures? why has no hunter made it the most remarkable of his trophies?”

His missile fell with a crash, but the creature did not stir. Then he hastily whipped out his revolver and fired. Still, whether he had hit or missed, only the same result. No faintest semblance of haste or alarm; the same slow deliberate gathering motion on the part of the Yellow Snake continued. Finally, steadying his hand securely—for surely his aim must have been confused by the tremor of his heart—he fired once more.

While he watched keenly for the effect, the Yellow Snake suddenly swelled to its utmost bulk, slid down the smooth rock, and shot like lightning into the boiling flood. No mortal creature could survive such a temperature, and yet—the ancient tradition was on record.

He hurried down from his post, sought a new coigne of vantage, and saw the appearance recommence. Again the yellow head peeping forth, again the sinuous body, again the thickening and



broadening. Had it crept back miraculously, through some crevice, from the spring, or was this yet another Yellow Snake, and was a whole family of them about to pass before his eyes? Again it darted along the rock and took its wild plunge. This time it seemed to burst into a hundred scintillations as it touched the surface of the water.

In feverish haste, the bold explorer laid hold upon anything at command to make a temporary foot-way. Some small cedars, of a tough variety, flourishing even here, made a principal resource. Constructing with his blanket and some twigs a sort of buckler against the heat, he passed over to the flat rock. He fired at a new materialization of the form. This time the creature was surely hit, for some bright splashes flew into the air, as if its very life-blood were shining yellow, too.

It was not a spot where one could stay long, but fortunately no long stay was needed. He found splashes of a yellow metal on the rock, and picked up his flattened bullets thickly encrusted with it. Returning, confused by the wreaths of steam circling round him, his foot slipped, and it was little short of a miracle that he had not ended his career in the boiling flood.

But he bore away the peculiar yellow flakes for



examination. He established himself in a place of safety by the cool brook, and proceeded to test them with acid, by trial of weight, and other convincing proofs of the assayer. What did he find? Ah, what indeed?

The splashes of metal scattered over the rock by his fire, and encompassing his bullets, were gold. The Yellow Snake was but a molten stream of the purest gold.

“Merciful heaven be thanked!” he cried, in unutterable gratitude, as this discovery with all its far-reaching consequences was borne in upon him.

Yes, it was true: subsequent investigation only served to confirm it. A thin stream of gold was here forced up, by tremendous pressure, from the inmost depths of the earth. The conditions of a gigantic crucible were present; some fierce volcanic heat, perhaps, had come in contact with veins of precious ore, tried out their contents, and formed a hidden reservoir. And the peculiar movement that had been observed was, no doubt, nothing more than the slow accumulation of the issue till it should have attained momentum enough to overcome the inequalities of the rock and make the plunge.

Pablo had heard the shots and called out, from a



distance, in alarm. Walter shouted back to him reassuringly, more afraid now to have him come near than he had before been annoyed at his lack of co-operation. Nevertheless, he did not succeed well alone, and so summoned Pablo to his assistance.

“There is some sulphur deposit here, of curious scientific interest,” he said, “and I want you to strengthen the foot-way I have made to yonder slippery rock, to get access to it.”

Pablo worked at this task with averted eyes, crossing himself frequently and hardly even once looking at the spot. Finally he refused to do more, and Walter kept him at it by presenting a pistol at his head, a harsh measure, no doubt, somewhat excused by the circumstances. The man was of a sullen, revengeful nature, and conceived from this proceeding a hatred of his master that was to have far-reaching consequences. He was next made to fetch a quantity of thick, adhesive clay, of which a supply existed at no great distance, and after that a capacious maguey satchel and other things from the baggage. Then he was effectually got rid of on pretext of bringing up part of the provisions from the point where they had been left on entering the cañon.



Don Walter, acting upon quick mechanical intuitions, crossed again to the flat rock, exposing himself to danger in a daring way, laid a rough line of stones, filled in their interstices rudely with clay, and smoothed this afterward, from a distance, with a long pole. He thus established both a dam which would check the metal in its flow to the spring, and a sort of conduit to lead it in a new direction. Then at the hither side of the rock, where his conduit ended, he fixed the maguey bag in a crevice, with its mouth well spread open, and lined the interior of the bag with a coating of wet clay.

Soon he had the unspeakable satisfaction of seeing the deposit of metal follow his new channel. He dragged out the bag, to which he had attached a stout rope, plunged it into the cool water, and tried its contents. The result was of the same amazing character as before: the whole was of pure gold.

Pablo returned, and was sent off again on some new pretext. Don Walter worked with tremendous diligence at making a long, low trough of stones and clay, capable of holding a large quantity of the deposit, and well hidden from sight. He also cast fragments loosely about the platform, to give a more natural look, in case any other—"which



righteous heaven forbid!" he murmured—should look upon it during his absence.

With his servant he crept for lodging, that night, into one of the hut-like bubbles of the lava-bed. He went back for a last look at his treasure, next morning, then set out on his return homeward.

On the climb he met with an accident which caused a slight lameness. The gossips above, who knew him for the man who had so rashly ventured into the cañon, shook their heads over it, as confirming the traditions of bad luck.

"It's an exhausting, thankless journey," said Don Walter, by no means desirous to dispute the impression. "I would never advise anybody else to take it, with so little to repay the trouble."

Pablo, for his part, had no more informing report. At the first opportunity he left his master and sought service elsewhere, at which Don Walter, with certain new projects revolving in his head, was not at all displeased.



## CHAPTER VI.

### A TALK IN THE STATELY GARDENS.

Amy went to town with Doña Beatriz to see the convent to which the latter had once belonged, whither the three nuns still liked at times to go and pray.

The quaint, spacious establishment, uniting peculiarities derived from the Moors to a florid Renaissance, had been occupied by turns as a warehouse and barracks, and the main tower of its church was cracked by an earthquake. In the cloister garden, for the most part overgrown, disorderly, and even squalid, a small spot was cleared and a stone seat was placed. This was before a wall on which, by some good-fortune, two or three fragments of what had once been extensive frescos remained. The plastered wall showed traces of target-practice, or perhaps of fusilage during a siege. A pious hand had lately put some fresh carnations and roses into pits left by some balls that had pierced a frescoed figure of Christ.



"Don Walter did this," said Doña Beatriz, indicating the improvements.

"Don Walter? is he, then, of so religious a turn?"

"On the contrary; or rather, like his father, he has the religion of the Americans, which is different from ours. He has even given me some books to prove that mine is false."

"But I do not understand why he takes such pains here."

"It was for our pleasure. I think he had heard—we had said something about it to the Señoritas Arroyo. He has a bold heart as well as a kind one; he is afraid of nothing. We should not have dared to do it, for fear of offending the authorities."

She walked away a little distance to a thick tangle of shrubbery near some old tombs, knelt upon a slab, as if to engage in prayer, yet scanned the vicinity with an anxious and furtive eye. Amy, looking at her and the desolation around, thought of the legend of the young nun who, praying in her garden, paused to hear a bird sing, and on turning round found everything decayed and a hundred years gone over her head.

"We like it here because these pictures are the only ones preserved," said Doña Beatriz, returning,



“and there are so many associations connected with this place.”

It might have been noted how she inclined to dwell upon Don Walter and his doings; and Amy, now that he had been gone a week, was glad enough to have someone to converse with on this subject. The recluse showed an interest, too, in all the little details of her daily life at the hacienda.

“I live so much in the world I fear I shall acquire a hopeless taste for it,” she said, deprecatingly.

“And why should you not? Why should you not be of it? You are too young and attractive to bury yourself thus, especially since you have no permanent vows to bind you.”

“That is what Don Walter has told me: he says I ought to go back to my family and to marry,” she rejoined, timidly.

Amy was startled. For the first time she reflected upon the attraction such a handsome young man might not unnaturally exert upon the demure novice, balancing between the gravest obligations to heaven and the frivolities of earth. But before she had time to go far in this direction she was yet more startled by a sudden question:

“Shall *you* marry Don Walter?”



"Oh, no; we are only good friends, pleasant companions," she replied, coloring and embarrassed to the point of hardly knowing what answer she made.

"You are so much together, and you are so beautiful."

"Don Walter will marry when it seems good to him, but he has need of much money, and I am poor. And besides, it is customary in these matters to wait till one has been asked," she concluded, laughing.

The Sister appeared naïvely convinced, even by these confused disclaimers.

"Is it truly so, captivating though you are? Your hair is like threads of spun gold."

"No, no; it is you who have lovely hair, Doña Beatriz; how heavy yet fine it is! And dark hair is far the more attractive."

On the return home, just at the point where the trail from the mountain joined the road, they met Walter himself. A great, glossy-leaved amape-tree, with a bench of brick and stone around its base, spread its ample shade there, and the street was not unlike that of a New England village.

Never before had Amy seen Walter so joyously animated, so full of fire, though he was also haggard



and wan, and a tired, sullen-looking *mozo* rode behind him. He stopped for but brief parley.

"I have been at the Barranca of Cimarron," he said, bending down from his saddle to the carriage.

"You look weary and careworn."

"It is nothing. I have something to tell you. I want your counsel—I want—I will go to the hacienda to-morrow to explain."

He had checked himself at sight of Beatriz, but the latter had seen already that burning ardor in his glance, that fervid meaning in his whole manner, which could have but one interpretation.

"If *you* do not love him, be *my* friend, speak to him of *me* !" she exclaimed, turning from red to pale, nerving herself to a desperate effort. "If he must have money, I can make him very rich. He does not know that. Oh, will you tell him? Can I trust you with so wicked a confession? I dare not look at you. Can I hope you will aid me in this?"

"It does not become a woman to sue," replied Amy, with no little disdain.

She abated her involuntary coldness, however, and again treated the giver of this impulsive confidence with affection before their parting. "But I speak in your own interest," she said. "If it is to



be, it will be ; heaven orders all things well. I will keep your secret, but a woman must not sue for love."

She found no great cause for surprise in what she had heard ; on the contrary, it all seemed natural enough ; but she went away changed, embittered somehow toward Walter, herself, and all the world.

Was the poor little recluse insane when she spoke of conferring treasures, or was there some ray of truth in the surmise of the Jefe Político ?

When Walter came to the hacienda he glowed with almost the same ardor as on the preceding day, yet an element of misgiving seemed to have crept into it. A coldness, too, on her part made itself felt even against all his impetuosity.

"Is there not some other who better deserves your confidence ? " she asked, haughtily.

"I do not quite understand."

"I have talked with Doña Beatriz. She tells me of your friendship, of the profound influence you have had upon her life."

"The poor little thing ! It is a pity to see her waste her existence in a cloister, still more in a mere imitation of one," he responded. A certain abstracted air appeared even in this reply ; he seemed



held by the overwhelming engrossment of a much more important idea.

“It appears that she is very unhappy on your account. She has even asked me to intercede for her. Will you bear witness that I have done so?” she concluded, almost disdainfully.

He looked at her astonished, and rejoined :

“I have exchanged but a very few words with her in all our acquaintance. Whatever influence I may have exerted upon her is apart from my own doing. I did not suppose a single worldly idea had ever entered her innocent little head.”

There was a hearty sincerity in this that carried conviction with it.

“Oh, how awkward I have been!” said Amy, ashamed of her girlish conduct, and alarmed for the inferences he might naturally draw from it. “It was only that I felt a little hurt, I think, at—at not having been informed of such an affair, if it were so. You must punish me by not telling me what you had in mind to tell.”

“On the contrary, I have come expressly to offer you a confidence I would intrust to no other human being.”

“That is a compliment indeed. How shall I show my appreciation?”



"I have penetrated to the heart of the ancient mystery and superstition: I have seen the Yellow Snake."

"Is it such an extraordinary secret? It really exists, then?"

"It really exists; and it is as different from what you may imagine as anything can possibly be."

"I trust it has not brought you the traditional ill-luck?"

"That remains to be seen; perhaps it depends upon you."

"Upon me? You do me too great honor."

"It was your suggestion that sent me there; honor to whom honor is due. I have scarcely eaten or slept since I saw you last," he broke out, in great excitement. "What do you think the Yellow Snake is?"

"How can I tell? It is wonderful indeed, if it disturbs you so."

"It is a deposit of the purest molten gold."

"This from you, so skeptical of all treasure-stories!"

"Oh, it is true. Oh, do not doubt it. A kinder fate seems to have smiled upon me. It is, perhaps, a treasure incalculable. See here!" And he drew forth some singular fragments of the yellow metal.



At the sight of these, some of his own excitement gained Amy. She gazed upon them and held them in her fair hands, with fascinated eyes. Walter Arroyo began an account of all that had happened. He had two objects in view, and it was his purpose to interweave them. His discovery permitted him to plan for a happiness that had heretofore been hopelessly beyond his reach.

"I had never before been consumed by so desperate a thirst for fortune," he said. "Why do you think it was?" he asked, pointedly.

All indications seemed to point to his saying that it was for her sake; but so chagrined was she by her recent conduct, so fearful lest he should think her forward, that she caught at any pretext for diverting the subject from such a channel.

"Come, let us sit down by the spring," she said. "Do you know, one day while you were gone it bubbled and surged as it had never been known to do before?"

Walter reflected, much struck by the statement. On verifying the date, it appeared that this disturbance coincided with his troubling the great travertine basin.

"It establishes the direct connection I have often fancied between the Barranca and the haci-



enda," said Don Walter. "It is, indeed, strange. There will possibly be some way of turning this to account in getting out the millions that may render it possible for me to become a humble citizen of your United States."

"How absurdly you choose to talk of your own country, as though everybody there were rolling in fabulous wealth!"

"Are there some who are not?"

"Oh, now and then, one," with a nonchalant irony; "for example, an occasional young woman."

Her remark fell upon most interested ears. The side issue became as momentous as the leading topic.

"You may have thought," said Amy, coloring, "from all the grandeur hereabouts, that I had everything on an equal scale at home."

"Perhaps I had some such impression."

"Very well, then, you were wrong. We were once in rather good circumstances, but that was before my time. I have never known anything but a genteel sort of poverty. I do not like to talk about myself; but, then, I do not like to be the subject of misconception. Now, that you are so rich, you will hardly have any tolerance for so indigent a creature."



"Tell me all about it," he said, in an almost caressing way.

"Our property was in the hands of a man who had been almost universally respected, and he appropriated it to his own uses without suspicion till it was too late."

Her companion grew agitated in a very different way, and let fall an involuntary exclamation, almost a cry.

"Oh, we were not the only ones to suffer," she went on, taking this for indignation. "He left a universal wreck. Banks, corporations, and private fortunes went down with him. He was a financial magnate whom everybody had trusted, and in whom everybody that trusted was betrayed."

"And what became of him?" asked Don Walter, with difficult utterance. "What did he do with the money?"

"He fled from the country, or, as some say, committed suicide. It was given out that he did not keep much for himself, but lost all in his speculations: I believe that is the usual way. Oh, it was a very great affair, I assure you, if there's any comfort in that. Perhaps you have heard of it even here. I sometimes see references to it in the newspapers as 'The Great Ridgefield Defalcation.'"



“Oh, God! no, not that?”

“What is the matter? what have I said? Why are you so disturbed?”

“To tell the truth, perhaps I have not heard all you have been saying. My brain is in a whirl over this new discovery. They say men often go mad at such times. Do not let me go mad! I have come to you for aid.”

“Tell me what I can do,” she demanded, alarmed at his gloomy change of manner, and most anxious to soothe him. He moved about in really quite a mad way.

“Where a man’s treasure is, there his heart is: I—I keep thinking the supply may give out. That did not occur to me so much at first.”

“Oh, I *hope* not, I hope not. Let us not admit that it is possible.”

“The first thing to do is to arrange my plan for securing the treasure—such as it may prove to be.”

“Yes, let us talk of that.” But the *rôle* of Amy, with her small experience in such a field, had to be evidently more that of sympathizing listener than adviser.

“I have thought of three plans. The first is to acquire a title to the spot, and regularly work it as



a mine. It would not be safe, under our distracted government, to do this. The second is to associate a number of influential people in my enterprise, pledged to secrecy, and under their protection secure as much of the deposit as possible. But, naturally, I do not wish to share it; and, so nervous and distrustful of human-nature have I become, that I cannot think of even a single person whom I would trust to help me in the matter."

"Not even your friend Perez, whom you esteem so highly? Surely here is a case where his peculiar characteristics ought to come in play."

"I do not believe anything bad of Perez, as I have told you, but I cannot get up the necessary confidence even in him. Captain Perez is my peculiar property, you see: I allow no one either to attack or defend him without contradiction."

"And your third plan?"

"To go alone to the Barranca, collect the gold, and convey it out in instalments as best I can. It is the one to which I am most inclined. My irregular ways of life heretofore will give me a certain advantage in passing back and forth without suspicion."

"But if you are discovered?"

"It is one of the chances. Even then I trust I



can hide the source of the treasure, and I will account for my own presence in the cañon by pretending to search for chemical deposits or fertilizers for my hacienda."

"There is one thing I have been thinking of from the first," said Amy. "If this supply has been going on for a long time, as the tradition would indicate, there must be somewhere an immense accumulation, in comparison with which the current product is a mere nothing."

"All that must come later. What falls into the stream at present probably disappears into the very bowels of the earth; so, no doubt, has all before it. To reach the accumulated deposit would be to move mountains or disrupt the Barranca itself; it could not be done undiscovered, nor by the strength of a single person."

"Yes, yes; I see that it could not."

"Besides, the problem is, whether it has flowed continuously, or only made its rare appearance from time to time. My heart is in my mouth when I reflect that the latter is probable and all may stop at a given moment."

"How do you account for the tradition of bad luck when the thing itself is really so fortunate?"

"By supposing the interest of someone to con-



ceal the truth, and then the superstition kept up by the ignorance and apathy of the poor native class, who change little even in hundreds of years. The story was the invention of the Pagan priest, who connected it no doubt with the worship of idols in the caves above. The priests found it politic to keep so good a thing to themselves."

Was it really uneasiness from the causes indicated that had thrown Walter into the deep depression by which his elation was succeeded? Amy asked herself, marvelling silently at the change in him. Just before he had been tender, even lover-like. He had taken her hand, and she could hardly find it in her heart to withdraw it. She had done so only lingeringly; there had been something so dreamily soft, so deliciously sweet and intimate in the contact.

"When I said my luck might depend upon you," he said, at parting, as if feeling that explanation was demanded, "I meant I needed someone to whom I could unburden myself. To you alone of all the world I am not afraid to give my confidence. You are so good, true, wise, and capable of keeping counsel. With you to favor and advise in the enterprise, I must be fortunate."

"No, no," his hearer protested, "I am weak,



shallow, frivolous; you are wholly mistaken; I have none of the fine qualities you credit me with."

"Nevertheless, I am very glad that it is to be you who are going to be the only person in the world to know where I am when I have gone away," rejoined Walter, smiling sadly.



## CHAPTER VII.

### DON WALTER SETS OUT FOR THE UNITED STATES.

Upon this the young man at once began to carry his plans into execution. He made a series of furtive excursions to the Barranca, finding each time a different way of getting there. At one time he would go by way of Campo Florido, as if setting out simply for Cruce Vivo; again he started from the other side of Las Delicias, and succeeded in picking out a path over the almost insuperable lava-beds; again he would fetch a compass even as far away as Rio Frio, a large town in quite another district, where he pretended to sell some of his horses or mules. From Rio Frio he got access to the gorge by way of Lake Jornada, a body of water some fifteen miles long. There was a settlement at its lower end, with a rude glass-factory. The end near the Barranca was desolate and frequented only by a few lonesome-looking alkali-gatherers, who collected that substance to be sold to the glass-factory.



In this new manner of life he had to shun Perez as well as the others. At last the worthy captain was piqued at the rebuffs he met with, and showed it.

"The fact is," explained Walter, "my good aunts are a little dissatisfied with our intimacy. You know how it is ; we have spoken of it before ; women get strange whims into their heads. Let us each go his way for a little while ; their whim will not last long, and our friendship will be all the better for it when it is over."

The same circumspection was used by Walter in disposing of the gold collected in his trips. Part of it he concealed in the gorge ; part was a growing hoard at Cruce Vivo, and another part still at the home of the unsuspecting Arroyo sisters, his good old aunts. Finally, one more repository was established at a lonely spot on the alkali shores of Lake Jornada.

During this time no words of more than mere friendly import passed between the pair who should have been lovers. Walter did not return to that mood, the meaning of which, at the time, had seemed hardly equivocal.

"Ah, well," reflected Amy, "sole confidante of his secret, partner in a great and hazardous enterprise, is not that enough for the present? When



it is all over there will be none to whom he can turn to rejoice with him—or to lament with him, if it be failure—as to me. When it is all over, who knows? Perhaps—perhaps—ah, well, let us see.”

It was agreed between them that whenever Walter was absent he should every day at a certain hour trouble the waters of the travertine basin, that the effect might appear in the spring at Las Delicias. The actual existence of such a connection had been established by sufficient trials, and Amy went as often as possible—she could not do so quite without fail—to see her basin thus strangely surge and splash. This singular means of communication, rude as it was, was a source of much reassurance to her. By it she could at least tell his whereabouts, assume that he was well, and be sure he thought of her. “Why,” she often sighed, “can I not send a message to him in the same way?”

The golden flow, according to the best estimates they made, was producing every day many thousand dollars; but neither of them could realize this as solid and tangible value. It seemed rather some game of splendid dreams and figures purely mythical at which they were playing. It was real and serious, and yet not at all real.



At last Walter mooted a wholly new project.

"I am overpowered with uneasiness; I do not have one moment's peace," he said. "When I am away from the Barranca I am constantly tortured by the fear that the flow has stopped, that somebody else has got access to it, that I am not doing the utmost to secure it, or that I have been, or shall be, followed in going in or out."

It was but too evident by his looks how mental turmoil and bodily labor were wearing him out.

"The last time I went up by El Jasmin I met our Señor Jefe Político, with two just as evil-looking minor officials behind him. That country is all in his district; of course he has a perfect right to be there, and he is probably not spying upon my movements, but it gives me a nervous feeling all the same. I must end this; I must go to the Barranca and stay there till the work is done."

"Alone in that dismal place? It would be too dreadful! Suppose you should be sick?"

"*À la guerre comme à la guerre!*" he responded as before: "that is one of the least considerations when there are so many more important things to think about. If anything should happen now, by my fault, when only these few poor thousands have been realized—a mere drop in the bucket to the



sum I must have—with what bitter regrets I should be overwhelmed. I could never forgive myself.”

“But how will your absence be accounted for? how long will it take? what if you should meet with any accident?” expostulated Amy, a thousand obstacles and dangers arising before her fancy.

“I must appear to go to the United States for a visit; that will divert attention from me entirely, and I may then do as I please in my retreat. But letters would naturally be expected from me. Will you help me in this also, or have I exhausted the measure of your aid?”

“You have not yet even begun to draw upon it.”

“Suspicion will thus be allayed; without letters it would be certain to rise, to say nothing of its being civil to write. Let us say then, one letter every three weeks; that will suffice for good aunts. I can plead being extremely busy, you know. Other people will hear of me through the post-master.”

“You speak of being gone for so long a time!” exclaimed Amy, dismayed at the prospect opened before her.

“I can estimate it almost exactly if the luck holds good, allowing of course a liberal margin for contingencies. I have never given you more



than the merest inkling of a burden and obligation that rest upon me, and I am not now prepared—it is not best—to do so. But of this I assure you, by whatever force you may attach to a solemn assertion of mine, that the object of my labors is a most worthy and honorable one, even one you may feel glad and proud to have associated with.”

Amy recollected with sympathy the hint he had once let fall, and her heart smote her at the injustice she had sometimes done him in thinking him merely mercenary or reckless.

“Till the last cent of the great sum I need is realized I must hold all my gains as a sacred trust. Before heaven! I seek no advantage of my own in this.”

He named it, the sum he required.

“So many millions?” cried Amy, aghast; “how can they ever be got?” Still, there was a certain reason to feel reassured, for had he not on a former occasion demanded the entire treasure in the heart of the earth?

“That being premised, there are now two things to do,” said Walter. “In the first place, will you give me a few points about New York—the hotel at which I may stop, the theatres, palaces, noble monuments, and galleries of pictures and sculpture



I may see—so that I can write as if I were actually there?”

“Alas! for our noble monuments and galleries! However, I will try to put our best foot foremost.”

“In the second place, are you capable of so much duplicity as to take my letters and find someone in New York to receive them and remail them to Mexico, as if coming from there?”

“It is a good cause and I undertake it. Yes, I am capable of so much duplicity.”

She sent one, in fact, to her friend Miss Winchester, another to her family, and another again to Miss Winchester, explaining it in each instance as a joke, the key to which they should have later.

The composition of the first letter was entered upon at once, and so much amusement was caused by mistakes arising out of Walter's preconceived idea of things in the United States that a humorous light was cast over the sadness of parting. It was proposed that Amy should prepare after each letter a few particulars, to give a sort of contemporaneousness to the next. He was to steal out of the cañon, in disguise, say once a month, to get these notes, and leave his letter and also one with some account of his own doings.

“Where shall we put the letters?” asked Amy.

L. of C.



“You know the cross set up at the spot where the English governess was killed by lightning : that is an excellent place. A natural, easy path goes by it, and there is a short cut across the fields to Campo Florido. You can easily make an excuse for going there. A number of earthen pitchers are hung on the cross by leathern thongs, and it is always in order to fill them with flowers. The letters also must be put in one of these and well covered over.”

Don Walter had already sounded his guardian aunts on the subject of a voyage to the United States, and when he finally announced his determination to go they were not much astonished. They thought it might not be a bad thing for him to see a little more of the world : perhaps he would settle down more contentedly at home on his return. He had no desire to hunt up his relations in New York, but he made this an occasion for finding out as much as possible about them. The Señoritas Arroyo, in fact, knew but little. They were distantly related to his mother and it was through this that they had come to adopt him ; but his mother had died before his father brought him to Mexico, and nearly all else was befogged and lost in the non-intercourse the odium of disgrace occasioned.



The kind spinsters made a pleasant reunion for him the evening before his departure. He was essentially of so frank a nature that he could with difficulty carry out his imposition. Amy was there with the rest. At the moment of farewell his eyes gazed long and lingeringly into hers, while her own were veiled with tears.

“If you do not come back?” she found opportunity to whisper.

“Yes, the worst also ought to be thought of, it is true. Why, then—then go to Perez and tell him about it. But that is to be only a last resort; give me plenty of time.”

Then he set out on horseback, a long journey, as if to take the railway for Vera Cruz. It was his plan, he said, to visit some business correspondents on the way, and he meant to dispose of his horse at Puebla to pay part of the expense of his voyage.

Some young acquaintances accompanied him a part of his way in customary lively fashion. After leaving them, he went on with a single servant, who carried his luggage. On the second day he insisted that the horse this *mozo* rode was lame and looked badly.

“I would not for anything that so good an animal should be permanently disabled,” he said. “Give



me the luggage on my own horse"—he had purposely made it light—"and do you go back. I shall get on perfectly well by myself."

The man demurred, in surprise, but the order was peremptory, and he had to obey. When the *Señoritas Arroyo* heard this they said, "It is exactly like our boy's warm heart, always considerate, both of man and beast."

As soon as the servant had disappeared up the road, Don Walter plunged into the thick woods. There was no one in sight in either direction to observe this unusual proceeding. Within an hour he reappeared, as a *peon*, with the usual copper-colored skin and cotton shirt and drawers of the class. He emerged from the woods near the spot where he had entered and took the road back toward Cuernavaca. The animal he rode was also considerably changed in appearance, and seemed to have been a victim of wanton neglect.

He passed the night at the same *meson* with his own servant, who was loitering comfortably on the return, and set out much earlier in the morning than the latter. When he reached a little-used trail, penetrating his own familiar mountain-district, he struck off into this. A wild brook followed the same course, often disputing his right of way.



Having gone a certain distance, he dismounted, stripped off saddle and bridle, and, with a sad but resolved air, led his horse aside into a thicket. The poor animal seemed to have a sense of some tragic fate impending. He trembled in every member and avoided the revolver that, as an imperative precautionary measure, was to have put an end to his existence, with so mighty a bound that he escaped from the hand of his would-be slayer, and took to the inaccessible bed of a torrent, where pursuit was useless.

“Go, then, in heaven’s name ; I am glad of it,” his master said, aloud, rejoicing in the chance that had stayed his hand from a repulsive cruelty, even with all the danger of detection it involved.

Then he shouldered his few effects in a bag, peasant-fashion, and went on on foot. Surely any acquaintance must have counted this a most extraordinary way in which to start for the United States.

After Don Walter had gone, Amy Colebrook felt far more than before the seriousness of her position. It was a weighty responsibility indeed for her, an inexperienced little American girl, to be down there in the far-off wilds of Mexico, the confidante of a secret of life and death and a monstrous treasure



with all its far-reaching interests. At times it seemed too formidable to bear, and she had to struggle hard not to betray her preoccupation to those about her. Nor was it of one sort only. Looking at the prospect of success from the hopeful standpoint, she would say :

“When he is very rich he will have other interests, other friends, and then—ah, me ! alas, and alas, for poor Amy Colebrook !”

If she had been fond of him before, her affection took a far greater intensity now that he was away, engaged in his arduous struggle with the powers of nature in the lonely cañon. She often dreamed of him, fancying she looked down upon him from the towering walls, and saw him there, a sun-scorched, storm-beaten figure, small, weak, and ill, amid those vast, stupendous surroundings.

Soon a startling episode happened. Don Walter's horse made his way back to the haciendita, and was recognized there. An old servant staked his veracity upon it, since he had raised the colt. The report went out that Don Walter had been murdered. This again—in the mountain-region—was laid to his ill-luck in having seen the Yellow Snake, and tended to keep people away from the gorge more than ever. The *mozo* who had accompanied



him toward Puebla was put under arrest. The Jefe Político, who personally would not have greatly mourned the loss of a forward young man given to laughing at his betters, was nevertheless stirred up by the unappeasable grief, and frequent fainting fits of the ancient Arroyo ladies, to do something. Captain Perez, too, was on the warpath. Amy was full of consternation, not because she believed Don Walter had come to harm, but lest this excitement should cause his discovery. She thought, in a half-helpless way, of appealing to Captain Perez to use his efforts to stop the hue and cry ; as if this would not have been equally fatal.

In the midst of it all came a letter from Walter, apparently safe, arrived in New York. The old servant was discredited and the Misses Arroyo recovered from their fainting-turns. Amy had a guilty feeling when they told her about Walter's travels. He wrote a most interesting letter, they said ; he described Broadway, Central Park, and the Brooklyn Bridge so that it was almost like being there ; but the excitement and fatigue of exploring a foreign country were great, and he would not have time to write often.

At the appointed time she left her communication for Walter as they had agreed. She watched,



and found it soon replaced by one from him, a sort of journal of his doings in the Barranca. What a mysterious feeling it gave to think he had been so near her, all unknown, unseen ; it was like the visit of a spirit. The second month he did not come at all ; no doubt the risk was too great. But the troubling of the spring still continued.

Then, all at once, the spring was not troubled. A second day this concerted signal was lacking, a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth—for eight days the waters gave no sign of disturbance, and Amy was thrown into an agony of fear.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE BARRANCA OF CIMARRON.

Don Walter utilized a bright night of the tropics for his final march to the cañon. A radiant moonlight still whitened all its strange features when, in the small hours of the morning, he arrived there.

He had already conveyed thither many things that would be useful to him, and his first care was to make something like a permanent home in one of the lava huts he had used temporarily. These were in reality a kind of rude glass, the effect of imprisoned steam forcing its way through the vitreous mass. They varied in size from a bee-hive to a cottage. Many were of snow-white pumice, and they looked like tents, from his door-way.

He took up his own abode in an inconspicuous mud-colored one, near the place where the treasure flowed forth, yet not so near as to establish any direct connection with it. It needed only an enlargement of the natural opening near the bottom,



and the cutting out of a port-hole-like window or two, to make it habitable. He spread some *petates*—mats of the maguey fibre—on the floor, and constructed a rude table and shelves for his scientific apparatus. Then, finding it gloomy, as he lay on his camp-bed, to gaze up into the Cimmerian darkness in the top of the tall cone, he made an opening for light there also, and later placed a ceiling, which divided the hut into two stories. Then he fitted rustic gratings to his door and windows, to keep out wild birds, or perchance even wild beasts, at night.

He had a natural taste for the ornamental, with all his masculine habits, and when this was done he set some plants in his window-openings, so that there was a certain hardy air of comfort about it. Just as the edelweiss is found in Alpine snows, so he brought back from his explorations small flowers—symbols, perhaps, of headstrong passion—that thrived as close as possible to the burning heats.

But he did not complete this work of installing himself till he had put the signal of communication with Amy upon a more stable footing.

“It had been my habit,” he said in his journal, “to throw into the basin large stones and pieces of



stalagmite broken off around its own borders. These anger it and thus cause a disturbance in some central chamber that finally reaches to you. But the ebullition seemed daily to decrease, and I feared there might be danger of choking up the tube and putting an end to it altogether. So I cast about for some less hurtful means, and found it by rigging up a long beam rested on a fulcrum, and with another short, heavily-weighted beam, hung on like a flail at one end." The sketch he drew of this device showed it not unlike an old-fashioned well-sweep of rural New England. "I can let down this flail end into the water, and stir up a more or less furious protest, as I wish, and then move it away again, to await the next occasion."

While the strange, dumb messages were going, he sat on the steps of the travertine terrace, dreaming of her to whom they were sent—having but scant leisure for dreaming at other times. He thought good to occupy a hut at this place also as a sort of spring-house. Indeed, he ultimately removed most of his apparatus here, and made it the headquarters for his analyses of the abundant material found in his researches. In addition to the other pretexts in mind, he might affect, in case of



discovery, to be taking baths for rheumatism, or to be a rapt devotee of science. They would set him down for a visionary, or even a lunatic, but this would only the better withdraw attention from the vital interest at stake.

“When other needed preliminaries were accomplished,” he wrote, “I had to inaugurate extensive improvements in my way of gathering and protecting the deposit. I felled some trees, where the lower margin of the forest encroaches on the cañon, slid them down, and drew them along on a kind of sled. My idea was to erect an efficient barrier against the searching heat and deleterious fumes from the boiling stream, one behind which I might have secure access to the golden spring. I therefore made two very large heavy frames of wood. I nailed crosspieces upon these, and smaller pieces again crossing the first. Then I bethought me what material, strong enough for the ordeal it would have to endure, would be suitable for filling the interstices.

“In making my way along a ledge at the top of the lower slope of talus, I came upon a strange substance in strata, white, reddish, or green, embedded amid serpentine rock and soapstone. It was apparently a mineral, and yet it was soft, even



silky to the touch, and elastic and pliable as any vegetable fibres. Surely this was the far-famed asbestos, a material indestructible even by the fiercest heat or flame. Nothing could have been more opportune for my purpose. I conveyed large quantities of it to my cabin, prepared the fibres, and with this thoroughly interwove the lattice-work of my frames, which were then ready for use.

“To put them in place I hoisted them with a small derrick to the top of the platform that had been my first look-out point, and from there let them carefully down. I secured them above by supports weighted with stones, and below the sharpened feet of the posts were let into holes by degrees prepared for them in the rock.

“I next made an improved course for the flowing metal, the first one having more than once given way at weak points. I made it longer, too, arranging an even grade for it across a considerable yawning interval, and I removed the receiving-trough to a greater distance. The new receiving-trough was larger and more smoothly finished within than the former, and I was even capable of lavishing a little ornament upon it, for what did apparatus so closely identified with the garnering



of this wondrous treasure not deserve? For a while I set up a small wheel in the cold brook, capable of sending a stream into the trough to quickly chill its contents, but this I afterward removed for fear of detection. Furthermore I scattered rough fragments of volcanic slag about in every direction, to artfully conceal, as I hoped, all traces of human handiwork.

“Nor was this enough. I felt it necessary to form around all the works and the entire place, including my hut, a covert of heavy stones resembling those in the central cairn. The dread of discovery is never absent from my thoughts, and, if discovered, the most desperate energy of one man could not expect to avail against such fierce cupidity as must be aroused by the temptation here presented.

“‘It is true,’ I say to myself, ‘that the spot is not on the route to anywhere, it is utterly desolate, nothing is to be gained by coming here, and the strongest prejudice exists against it. And, yet, other men may come as I have done; other men have come, as witness the superstition, and the accurate account of the phenomenon given even by my guides.’

“I brought down my derrick, set it up again,



and placed with it numerous cyclopean blocks, resembling those of the central cairn, leaving a winding, irregular path among them. When this was done, I thought the whole too formal, and spent much time in giving it a more random effect. I look with longing, envious eyes on all the tongues of flame and strong steam-jets going to waste here; were I quite free from constraint, how I would make these natural forces work for me!"

These passages of the journal—against the bare chance of their being found by any third party—were but fragmentary and half disguised under the form of a fairy-tale, and he made mention of no definite locality. The journal was intended in good measure for the eye of Amy, but it would have been hard to say just when any particular portion of it came into her hands, and whether it was early or very much later that she saw even those here quoted. There were many important circumstances the writer could not set down in his account for her out of common prudence, and others that he would not out of native modesty. Thus his journal contained but little, for instance, concerning his own painful labors, which were often really herculean.

His various tackles were wofully inadequate,



compared with the tasks he imposed upon them. He quite dismissed the ordinary standard of human achievement, and performed prodigies of strength and Archimedes-like miracles of invention. His muscles, always powerful, responded grandly to the tax upon them, and he developed new powers unsuspected in himself. Yet, driven on by his fervid zeal, he was always dangerously near some of those violent strains or shocks that would have put an end to all and crippled him for life. He was constantly, by turns, cold, wet, hungry, scorched by excessive heat, or weighed down by almost unendurable fatigue.

“The earlier Croesus,” he said, “offered a prize for a new pleasure; I, the later Croesus, might offer one for exemption from any possible pain.”

Nevertheless, he by no means complained, but, on the contrary, even rejoiced in his hardships. They seemed to give him a more valid title to the treasure. They were a mere nothing compared to the life-long drudgery to which most men are condemned, not only to amass wealth, but even to obtain a bare subsistence. The slightness of his real claim was one of the causes of his nervous dread lest all should be snatched from him even at the last moment.



“It is the destiny of man to win his bread by the sweat of his brow!” he often exclaimed, “and woe to him who tries to escape it! I am reaping a good fortune far beyond what is granted to the ordinary lot of mortals, and I ought to be glad of any small semblance of earning it.”

Paths were traced over the cinder-heaps and purple-black emery-sand by his frequent goings and comings. They grew as familiar to him as the streets of Cuernavaca, and he could follow them as well by night as by day. It seemed to him he had been there a very long time; former periods of existence became visionary, the world of men grew small in contrast with this world of elemental forces. He had dedicated himself to Vulcan; he was communing directly with that mysterious heart of the earth toward which his fancy had been so strongly drawn. He felt its throbbing pulse in earth-quake tremors; he heard its breathing in the issuing steam, and sometimes a mysterious sound like a heavy plaintive sigh came forth and pervaded all the place. He might have thought, as the simple natives say of Popocatepetl, that wicked chiefs were imprisoned below for their crimes, and their groans and murmurs were often heard.

At night he had around him lights and sounds



as of a great city, while in truth there was only unbroken lonesomeness on every hand. He thought upon his last end and the brevity of life, as one could hardly help doing amid such surroundings. Still, he was not often gloomy. He was full of aspiration for love, power, display, for all those things that an ardent young man may desire, and for which his desire seemed now to stand no small chance of gratification.

“My apprehension,” he related, among other things, “has led me to take a lesson out of the book of nature, and imitate certain animals whose safety lies in being of the same color as the objects around them. I have easily reduced my clothing to the general dusty hue of the Barranca, and thus glide about very little distinguished from my background. There is steam generally floating in the air, and this is, perhaps, an efficient protection against being seen from above; but I have often fancied I saw troops of animals and men peering down from there.”

It was vagaries of crags and fringing bushes for the most part that produced these illusions, but occasionally he may have been right, for some of the lonely charcoal-burners who inhabited the district may have stopped a moment to gaze down-



ward in passing by. However, there was never any indication that he was seen, and no harm came to him from this source.

He had a quick eye for natural scenery, and did not soon lose his interest in the striking original effects offered him in the Barranca. From his hut he saw the sun rise and set like a flaming beacon on the towering cliffs. These cliffs, broken into a thousand fantastic or castellated shapes, were at some places sheer, uncompromising, terrible, leaving no rest for the eye as it scaled their heights in search of lodgement. Elsewhere they showed basaltic columns, some tossed at random by eccentric force, others standing upright, and many broken off as if for pedestals for gigantic statuary. Small lateral cañons, too, opened from the cliffs—curious nooks, of sharp fracture, forever hidden from the sun.

If Walter found any beautiful thing, he laid it aside in his cabinet, hoping some day it might delight the eyes of Amy. He put away for her amygdaloids, almond-shaped crystals formed in air-cavities of the lava, specimens of scoriæ and pumice filled with crystalline deposit, and fossils that had once been under the sea. And how many a bulky mass of pudding-stone he broke asunder



with his hammer to search in this promising matrix for diamonds !

“Such a laboratory affords all the conditions for the formation of precious stones,” he argued. “The diamond is only carbon, the amethyst silica, and the ruby and sapphire alumina, all crystallized slowly under enormous pressure. Why should I not find some of them ? ”

Nevertheless, his efforts in this direction did not meet with success.



## CHAPTER IX.

### PERILS AND ALARMS OF THE BARRANCA.

“What do I believe is the origin of it all? What theory shall I set down?” the journal ran. “Ah, with what good reason I now regret the lost opportunities of my school-days, that might have made me a thorough master of such an exceptional situation as this! I know only what I could not help knowing. Is there a central ocean of heat? I cannot think so. In that case my refreshing cold spring must have been as hot as the perfervid one alongside of it, and all springs alike must be hot. The tides of such an ocean, if it existed, would soon rack this frail crust of earth to pieces. No, no; the heat that comes to us in such irregular places and degrees is of local origin. As I conceive it, our black and solid earth is a mass of virgin elements to most of which water and air have not yet got access. When they reach any part of it, it slacks like lime, and a heat is set up sufficient to melt the hardest rocks. Or, again, different



chemical elements being thrown together by movements of the outer crust would set up a fierce energy in their combination. No need to go down to an internal ocean for heat, and to suppose my thin stream of beneficent treasure comes from there. It would have cooled and solidified, like other veins of metal, long since.

“The rich veins that miners love, the wedge-shaped ones, increasing in breadth as they go down, are formed by injection from below. The metallic stream has run or the metallic vapors cooled in some chance crevice of the everlasting rocks, and there was my vein.

“There was my vein, good! Now, what has happened to make this my crucible and bring the gold up to me in molten form? One of three things, as it seems to me. A jet of gas or superheated steam, like a blast from a blow-pipe, may have touched the vein; or violent chemical action may have broken out close to it; or what if one of the liquid sheets of lava that, unable to reach to the surface, force themselves between the strata sideways for long distances, and are hundreds of years in cooling, had obtained access to it?”

So he went on with his speculations. He cut thin laminæ of the lavas, and, examining them



under his microscope by transmitted light, could tell the depths from which they came. The great caldron of boiling lava he had named *La Caldera* seemed a veritable mouth of the infernal regions. It gave out an almost continuous roar, and from time to time shot forth fiery bombs with showers of scintillating drops, and fan-like tails of beautiful spun glass, as fine as hair, streaming behind them. With microscope and spectroscope he found these bombs from the still active crater made of native sodium, calcium, magnesium, and potassium—the precise materials of the wandering meteorites that fall to us from trackless space. He found the heart of the earth identical in composition with the illimitable stars. The result of all these studies, though they should never have any other, was to vastly increase his reverence for the sublimity of creation.

In the neighborhood of his dwelling he had found a series of caverns, and these he turned to use as receptacles for his garnered treasure. They were of various shapes and sizes, some connecting too among themselves, others standing singly. They were formed, like his hut, of a shell of lava which had cooled, while an inner stream, still fluid, had passed on, leaving them high and dry above it.



Every day Walter collected and stored away its own accumulation and instalment. How slowly the amount seemed to grow, to the view of his ardent impatience ! The normal return was liberal, and even princely, but there were days when the stream did not flow pure, being mingled with, or even almost wholly composed of, a lava imitating its color. These drawbacks, which seemed to follow especially some of the volcanic tremblings and oscillations in the valley, reduced the expected average of value. He made an *arrastra*, or crusher, of large revolving stones, to break up the bulky pieces, and a smelting apparatus, to reduce the portions thus alloyed to the condition of the rest.

His caution led him to do much of the storage-work at night : so familiar was he with the ground that he could carry it on then almost as well as by daylight. The fragments of rough slag along the way took every variety of eccentric shape, and often startled him at first with the vivid likeness to crouching wild beasts or human figures with weapons in their hands, but no real peril arose.

One night he returned late from a visit to his caverns. Jupiter was shining very brightly at the time, and he was looking up at a nebulous halo



about the brilliant planet. Suddenly there flashed before him something like a lantern swinging in a man's hand. It came from behind a rock directly into the path, and was too near for him now to retreat.

"Who goes there?" he asked, at the same time raising his revolver.

With the commingled voices of the valley in his ears, he thought he heard murmured words, but no definite answer was vouchsafed. The light approached nearer, so near that its gleam fell directly upon him. He fired—once! twice! the bullets singing to their mark as in a vicious way. The appearance merely lifted, shot up into the air, and exploded with a bright effulgence and slight crackling sound. It was a sort of will-o'-the-wisp or St. Elmo's fire.

After this such vagrant dancing flames were not infrequent: they were perhaps connected with the beginning of some new period in the weather. Walter was not superstitious, but he had heard many old wives' tales, and one had need to be stout of heart indeed, for if goblin shapes and spectral visions ever appeared this place should be more favorable to them than most others.

The time came round for him to convey his let-



ters to Amy. He prepared the missive for his aunts, using in it the points she had given him. If these lacked a little freshness, they, in their small experience, would never detect it. He had thought he would employ his long periods of leisure at the Barranca in writing pages upon pages to Amy, laying open every thought before her; but when his labors were over he dropped half dead with fatigue, and somehow nothing was ready for statement; the time had not yet arrived. She reproached him afterward for the lack of fulness in his intelligence, saying:

“You might just as well have been in New York, for all I really know of you.”

He stole out in disguise, made his trip to Las Delicias, and returned almost like a man walking in his sleep, so little did he seem now to belong in the upper world, and so engrossed was he with what he left behind. He could hardly have told it was not a dream, except for one awakening shock of alarm he had in coming face to face with his former servant Pablo. It was near the village of La Madalena, west of the hacienda, in the morning, and the eyes of this stupid man—who was driving some young stock marked with the brand of the Jefe Político—opened wider and wider at



him in growing recognition. Don Walter stumbled and fell as by accident, gave one of the cattle a sharp thrust that threw the troop into confusion, and, amid the dust and turmoil, slipped into a cloister, whence the sing-song hum of urchins reciting their spelling-lesson to the schoolmaster was heard, and so out on the other side, and escaped.

The account, too, he had from Amy's letter of the hue and cry raised about his horse was a further awakening influence.

He marvelled at the danger he had narrowly escaped, and at the sweetness and kindness of her who must have been so sorely tried for him. The consequence of all this was that the risks seemed too great, and he missed entirely the next date set for his venturing forth.

The subsistence problem was a simple one; his fare in the cañon was even more than frugal. Yet sometimes a youthful stomach would crave a sustenance more suited to maintain the vigor of the body in the arduous labors in which it was engaged, and then he put his gun on his shoulder and went along the lower ledges of the enclosing walls. Most wild creatures would naturally have a salutary dread of the place and give it a wide



berth; nevertheless, some game was to be had. Once he killed a deer, of which there were plenty in the forests above. He had no fear about the reports being heard, for they would easily be confounded with the detonations of the place itself.

One eventful day, a dread that had long haunted him at last came true. To him, as to Robinson Crusoe, there appeared a man within his peculiar domain. It was on the return from one of his hunting-trips that he saw this stranger, near the lava-basin. The man had at first sight the miserable aspect of one of the poor alkali-gatherers; but presently Walter found in him a familiar look. He fancied he recognized Kaufmann, the foreman of the glass-works at the lower end of Lake Jornada, a workman of much ability in his line, brought over originally from famous Murano.

Walter had been told in visits paid there that it was upon the skill of Kaufmann that the success of the manufactory chiefly depended.

“What is he doing here in such a guise?” murmured Walter. “He has the air rather of searching for some outlet than of making discoveries; yet there is no surprise or treachery that I ought not to be prepared for; there is no telling what he may stumble upon by accident, if not by design.



I must not let him get out of my sight for a moment."

He stole along at a distance, keeping a parallel course to that of the visitor, while screening himself behind intervening obstacles.

His heart throbbed faster and faster, and began to be fairly in his mouth as the invader moved on, and it was evident that the arrangements—though, to be sure, expressly made to throw dust in the eyes of the public—were about for the first time to receive inspection. Instead of keeping straight on, however, the foreman, whose course was a meandering one, and who might really have had no more intention in entering the valley than to get out of it, bore to the left.

This line, converging upon that furtively pursued by Walter, crowded the latter into yet more secure hiding. Crawling over a slope of débris between two parallel rocks, near the side-wall of the gorge, his eyes still cast about for the enemy, he did not at once perceive an even more formidable danger that awaited him. He looked up, to discover a large, powerful wild beast, reddish brown, with white throat, poised before him, ready to spring.

"The lion! the lion!" was his startled exclama-



tion mentally. His faculties were all but paralyzed for a moment at this sudden peril.

He had recognized the formidable animal known as the cougar, the American lion, though in reality it is more like a panther than a lion. But even in the midst of his panic he could not help recalling a ridiculous story wont to be told by a boasting friend of his, of how he had once met one on the Cumbres, near Boca del Monte, with no weapon but an umbrella in his hand; he had thrust the umbrella down its throat, and, thanks to this distraction, got off unharmed. For his own part, he had never got nearer one than very long range, though he had often tried to do so, nor had he seen any other wild adversary since coming to the valley more dangerous than an occasional red wolf prowling at a distance.

His stealthy, unconscious approach, so different from either fear or hostility, had perhaps puzzled the animal: it may have regarded him with an element of curiosity. It stood with one paw raised to strike; its greenish optics gave out that glint of elusive expression that is the essence of untamable savagery, and the lips of its whiskered visage were drawn back from its savage jaws.



Walter, by nature quick in action, had his rifle already in position and a finger placed on the trigger. But to fire would be to betray his whereabouts to the stranger and his secret to the world : better any risk than that ; he must not shoot till it was imperatively the last resort. With the other hand he slowly drew his sharp *machete* from his belt. The same avoidance of shock that had kept the animal quiet thus far availed him in this, but when the shining blade was fairly out it seemed to act as a challenge.

Walter felt the bound as of a heavy body made of whalebone and steel, felt the violent collision as it impinged upon his weapon, firmly set like a bayonet to receive a charge, felt the ground give way beneath him with a crackling and crunching sound, knew he was falling and being buried, and finally came to his senses in the bottom of a deep pit on a bed of snow.

What had happened? A thin roof-crust had broken through, and he was in one of those cavities on the side of the sunless north, overhung by the tallest of the brooding cliffs, where the snows of some phenomenal season, or perhaps even of some past geologic epoch, were permanently hidden and preserved. The city of Catania, in Sicily, is thus



supplied with ice preserved under the lava-floods of *Ætna*.

He must have fallen some twenty feet: how was he to get out? Jarred, bruised, and benumbed as he was, there at first seemed no way of scaling the rough walls. There was danger, too, of his sinking lower, and even being buried out of sight in the soft snow. He tied one end of his lasso to his rifle, then, nerved by desperation, inserted his *machete*, which had fallen with him, into a crevice of the rock, stepped upon it for a support, and laid hold of some opportune projections above. He repeated the process till, little by little, he reached the top, and then drew up his rifle after him.

It was a work of no speedy accomplishment. The moon was shining over the edge of the *Baranca* when he emerged. The wandering invader of his realm, and the ferocious animal, had alike disappeared. No trace remained of either. It had all transpired in a flash, like some of the absurd things he had seen in pantomimes by the *zarzuela* companies at the theatres.

The vividness of the episode passed away in time, as that of others had done, but it served as a reason for increased alarm and new precautions.



## CHAPTER X.

### FAILURE SUPERADDED TO HARDSHIP.

Walter by no means used the more obvious places of concealment in his caverns, but sought the inmost penetralia. His plan was to fill stout bags he had brought with him, like those of the sulphur-gatherers of Popocatepetl, full of the treasure, and, after depositing them, to heap them over with black sand and scatter loose fragments on the top. When this supply of bags was exhausted, he made little heaps of about the same cubical contents, that he might keep the basis for his general estimate unimpaired, and covered them with sand in like manner.

Standing in one of these caverns where he had piled the bags several tiers high, he would liken himself fancifully to the famous Inca of Peru in his room full of gold which the remorseless Pizarro had demanded as ransom.

His over-anxiety even led him to make his precautions too elaborate. He connected together the



different depositories by means of a system of clews, all leading to a centre, and carefully hidden from sight, but somehow his clews became disorganized and thrown into such confusion that he himself had much difficulty in finding many of the places again. A more serious matter still was the falling in of some of the roofs upon the bags, which it cost him severe labor to recover from their interment.

All this put him upon seeking yet more secure hiding-places, and these he found in caverns of greater extent and stability in the sidewalls of the Barranca. There was unmelting snow near some of them, too, as in the pit into which he had fallen, and this served his purpose quite as well as sand for covering up his ingots.

In exploring these, he entered an opening behind a small grove of trees from which all vegetation was blasted, leaving only bare whitened limbs, rattling together like skeletons. No sooner was he a few feet from its mouth than he felt his head benumbed by an overpowering heaviness and his limbs sink under him. With an instinct to fly that seemed the last expiring effort of consciousness, he crawled out on his hands and knees and reached the free open air again. He lay for a considerable



time with the blood beating loudly in his temples, gasping, and unable to rise. He had got into a new Avernus, or a place like the famous Grotto del Cane at Naples, which no animal can enter and live.

Returning to this spot afterward, and examining it with a caution which the adventure induced him to extend to all his other researches as well, he found it a vent of deadly carbonic-acid gas. There was even a sort of natural tank without, which was filled by the gas pouring down into it. In this Don Walter, with his youthful taste for novelty, managed to bathe, keeping his head well above the gas, so much heavier than air, and he thought he found a peculiar refreshment in it for his tired bones. The transportation of his hoard and rearrangement of it in the new quarters was another work that occupied no small time.

He kept a careful diagram of all the places of deposit, and a rude tally-book with the contents of each. The amount grew apace; he had freight for many mules, and, still attaching no definite ideas of value to it, he was always vaguely troubled by the speculation as to how he should get it out of the country; that, he felt, was likely to be an even more difficult undertaking than the other.



To really go to New York and enlist some American capitalists who should make it a sort of international enterprise; to confide in General del Prado; to pretend to engage in the business of dealing in stock between this part of the country and the coast, and, in his various trips, convey away the treasure, depending upon an arrangement with some irregular vessel afterward to transport it over-seas—all these projects passed through his mind, and their attendant obstacles followed close behind them. He could not reconcile himself to bringing in outside assistance at this late stage; yet he was two hundred miles from the coast by the nearest line, and the country abounded in unscrupulous characters, not to say positive brigands.

“But I will not cross the bridge till I reach it,” he said to himself; “there is time enough and to spare, heaven knows, and some way will surely be presented.”

Meantime, he determined at last to prepare a statement for Amy containing such a full explanation of his identity, his depressed views of life, and the real nature of his mission in coming here, as would set all that she ought to know, or might naturally be supposed to be interested in knowing, clearly before her. If he failed she would at



least comprehend what he had tried to do, and—though if he failed life contained nothing but blackness, and he looked forward in no pharisaical way to winning her on his good intentions alone—there would be a certain mournful satisfaction in that. He wanted her to have this before he saw her again, that she might have had time to be thinking it over. He included in the confession no more of his love for herself than might be inferred : all that would come later.

The whole was disguised as before, purporting to be only an account, by one Ignacio Gomez, of what had happened in the ancient land of Cibola.

There were two things in the valley that greatly affected the imagination of Walter. The one, which, as it came to nothing, may first be briefly dismissed, was the question, what had become of all the deposit of the golden spring in times gone by? Pressing almost unwarrantably close to the boiling stream in defiance of the fierce heat, he found an ancient inscription on one of a number of great stones that seemed to have been tumbled into it, as it were, above its very source. Perhaps these stones had come there not by accident but design. The stream rose in its greatest strength from immediately beneath them, being bent down



by them like a stout sapling, and thus forced over to impinge violently on the rock whence the Yellow Snake leaped forth. They certainly changed its course. What if the accumulation of treasure did not lie deep in the bowels of the earth, but only in the bed of this stream, which had been turned over it by those who would preserve the secret from the general eye? And they, heathen priests or whoever they might have been, what had become of them—if his fanciful surmise was right—that the secret was lost? But that was now out of the reach of any human divination.

Walter Arroyo continually regarded the stones with tantalized and hungry eye, but to displace them was beyond the force at his disposal. And then, too, could he command the mechanism and materials for the powerful explosions necessary to bring about such a result, the effect upon the present source of supply must be greatly dreaded. The shock might disturb an equilibrium no doubt very delicate, and so put an end to the goose that laid the golden egg.

The other subject by which he was haunted——  
But let it be stated in his own words :

“Cannot the source be enlarged upon and improved? Perhaps there is a much larger quantity



of the metal than appears. It may be pushing for exit in large supply just behind the face of the rock there, and only checked by a too narrow orifice."

He had observed that the flow was freer on days of low barometric pressure, and the fact gave credibility to his surmise.

These ideas were present to him whenever he went near the source. In his feverish haste to secure more rapid returns, the temptation was a most seductive one. Little by little he yielded to it.

Very cautiously, very delicately, he removed a small portion of the rock, and slightly enlarged the opening. Joy! the flow distinctly rounded itself out to the larger bore. Again, and yet again, he broke off with his hammer and short drill some further portion of the rock. It was apparent it would stand even more. He probed the opening, always with the same delicacy, using a long crow-bar, and this had a most excellent effect: the stream still expanded to its increased opportunities. Visions of a speedy end to the rest of his arduous task swam before the warm fancy of the experimenter.

It seemed as if a very small, inoffensive blast with powder might be tried. A hopeful ardor put



down the voice of prudence. The blast was placed and fired.

Ah, heaven! who could have foretold, who could have believed credible, so hideously painful a result? The flow ceased instantly, absolutely, and no subsequent efforts could recover it. The goose that laid the golden egg was slain indeed, and by Walter's own hand.

At first he felt that only some insignificant fragment had blocked the way, which could easily be removed, but he cleared away the débris without result. Then with breathless increasing haste he began to work—with short drill and long drill, with mattock and pick. He fell upon the recalcitrant rock with the energy, the fury, of coming despair. Mere tools would not answer, but he would still reach back to where the elusive golden stream had hidden its head. So he fired blast after blast in increasing quantities, till most of the rock was shattered away, and the whole appearance of the place was changed.

“Oh, immeasurable dolt! Oh, ineffable madman!”

So he called himself, and in the first access of his dismay and disappointment he drew his revolver, purposing to end his days; but even then



some vestige of fine old Stoic philosophy and courage remained and stayed his hand.

“If this stream be checked here, it must come out somewhere else in the vicinity, or at least in the Barranca,” he cried. “I will not be baffled so! I *will* have it!”

He knew in his heart, however, that it might be at no more accessible a spot than the bottom of the boiling torrent.

He nowhere found any indication of it. Then he began to go over again, with redoubled painstaking, all his former researches for treasure in some other form. He said to himself that they had been only superficial, when, in fact, they had already been most thorough. Once more he broke the pudding-stone for diamonds, once more washed the sands of the brook and the alluvial earth, holding up his pan to the light, that the sunbeams might catch with a glitter on any chance particles of gold, and once more made small chambers over the *respiradores* and *fumaroles* to condense the sublimated mineral vapors. He was more like a crazy man than one in the full possession of his faculties.

The most daring attempt of all he made was to actually descend into the open lava-caldron. He wished to secure some of the glowing ruddy liquid



always boiling there, with flame and smoke, on the bare wild chance that it might contain gold in its composition.

With the apparatus he had prepared, he got to windward of the fumes, and descended one of the steep, rocky slopes of the crater. Here was a sort of terrace, or narrow ledge of black and loamy soil, like dried-up mud, within which, as in a vast black melting-pot, and at a lower level, was the hellish, seething broth that he would test.

He proceeded to let down an earthen jar made fast with an iron chain. The bucket struck the surface, filled, and disappeared. Walter attempted to pull it up on the instant, but the incandescent flood had already melted off bucket and iron chain, the latter as far as its fiery chaps had reached, and he staggered back with only a useless remnant of the chain in his hand.

“What shall I do next?” he demanded.

He bethought him of his asbestos, with which he had had in other ways so successful an experience. He procured a new supply of it, constructed a sort of dipper-box of this fire-proof material, and also twisted a rope of the fibres, to be attached to it. Thus prepared, he returned to the crater another day. He let down the asbestos bucket and secured



the specimen he wanted. But, after all this, it proved to be only lava, differing but little from what lay about him on every hand.

This was his last resort. He might be said to return from it like another Orpheus returning from Hades, for, in his consciousness of failure, he, too, seemed to leave behind him the dear Eurydice who had been his promised reward. His own danger had been great throughout, but he made nothing of that. Perhaps he would not have cared overmuch if fate had there seen fit to put an end to his existence after so miserably balking his plans.

There was every reason to believe that all was now at an end, and nothing more remained for him to do in the Barranca. He had only to secure what he had, and invent that plan for getting it out of the country which he had so long kept in abeyance. Consolatory mental voices tried to persuade him that even his present success was not to be despised; but he would have none of this.

“To give back some millions that nobody had expected might be thought to have a fine effect,” he said, “but there would still remain people to whom other millions were due. How could I hold up my head and take the world in a bold fashion so far as they are concerned? No, it would only be said



that a part of the robbery had been made good by way of a compromise with conscience for keeping the rest. It would never be believed that one who had so much had not the whole."

These reflections, quixotic perhaps from the shrewd, practical point of view, may have aided his reluctance to leave so hard-fought a field. He could not bear to give it up. A pertinacious obstinacy and lingering hope kept continually springing to life even now.

"What if I go out to one of the larger cities, even as far as Mexico," he said, "get a new supply and better blasting-material, return, and try again? This dynamite, of which they talk so much lately, would, no doubt, suit my purpose here. With plenty of good explosives, I will shatter every stone in the place, if necessary, till I come to the Yellow Snake. And then I can look for the lost deposit, too, without hurting any other interest."

So ran his final decision. Every day until now he had sent the message of his safety to Amy by the spring. With what suffering the dumb current would have pulsed, could it have conveyed his own feelings, in these later days, to her! But for awhile the signal must be abandoned. The third period set for the exchange of letters had also come



around. He determined, therefore, to stop on his way at Las Delicias, both on account of the letters and to reassure Amy as to the cessation of the signal and the beginning of his wanderings.

“Was *she* well?” At first thought it seemed almost absurd to fancy anything could happen to one so tenderly cared for in the midst of every luxury; all dangers rather were reserved for his own lot. But he knew that pale death, with sickness and calamity as well, knocks equally at regal palaces and at the hovels of the poor, and no small anxiety about her was added to the sum of all the others. His letter to her breathed, even though he tried to guard against it, a sense of his discouragement, fatigue, and uncertainty about the future. He hesitated much as to whether he should put in the confession he had prepared for her, but decided in the affirmative. Was there not now all the more reason for it, since the prospect of success had grown so remote?

All was made ready for departure: he left his belongings in as wild a state as possible, and began to climb the craggy wooded path. Here, as once before, he met with an accident. A large stone rolled from its place under his touch and bore him down. It pinned him to the earth, yet was stopped



by several small obstacles from crushing him with its full weight. He managed to extricate himself, but was in great pain and unfitted to proceed.

A forlorn wounded creature, he dragged himself back to his hut, and, his hurts stiffening and taking an even more aggravated form before they got better, he lay there for many days capable only of the efforts necessary to secure such food and drink as would maintain life. He seemed abandoned by heaven and earth; his lonely unbefriended condition made a scornful mockery of the golden dreams in which he had so lately indulged. Nevertheless, no bones were broken, nor was any lasting injury wrought, and, though the torment of mental activity retarded his recovery, he slowly regained sufficient of his forces to be about again.

Then he went back to look at the locality of the Yellow Snake, beset by the secret hope that in this long interval it must have come forth again. But there lay the scene made desolate by his imprudent labors, as still and devoid of any trace of it as ever, and so once more he set out for the upper world in a state of great depression.

In all this time he had not once touched the signal, nor could he now renew it. He only bestowed upon it a sad smile in passing to think how



far beyond his strength it was to replace the apparatus which by precaution he had unshipped. The visit to the hacienda therefore was all the more imperative. These were the days that had well-nigh broken Amy's heart. He thought often of her anxiety, but he could not help her. There was nothing to be done; he could only hope for the best.

There was something revivifying in the air of the higher levels and in having to use his powers of strategy, and he began to improve at once. He reached the vicinity of Las Delicias, concealed himself a part of the day in the *Pedregal*, or lava-field, and went at night to look for his letter. He was right in supposing Amy would go often to the trysting-place under such unusual circumstances. He found a letter from her, full of alarm at the prolonged rupture of communications. For the rest, besides the collected news from New York, she gave him some of the uneventful gossip of the hacienda.

"I told you all of it before," she said, "in the letter I left for you a long time, and then had to take back, because you did not come. Now I tell you again; perhaps I shall have to take this back also. There is little to say about our quiet life;



you could almost invent it all for yourself. But it may interest you to hear that our exemplary friend the Jefe Político, Señor Don Tomas Corcovedo, has formally proposed for the hand of Luz, and has been rejected. You would have learned it from my former letter, for it happened a good while ago. Señor Corcovedo has shown himself very indignant in consequence, and has tried to be disagreeable in various ways. I hear that he has let fall to the General grumbling, half-threatening expressions about people who are lukewarm in their devotion to the government. But this surely could not have been intended for our dear General, for nobody is more truly patriotic than he.

“But why do I talk of other things? Where are you? what has happened? I come to look, so often, and find nothing. Am I wrong to be so oppressed and anxious?”

Walter replaced it with his own, as on a former occasion, adding a few words to the effect that he would not go at once, but would try to wait about to receive some little further communication from her. He found the ancient corral, that had been Trinidad José's, deserted, and took refuge there for the night. There would have been an excellent view of the memorial cross, in the morning, from



behind its low rambling walls, except that a number of yellow straw-stacks were scattered over the space between, the faces of some of them rudely sculptured, after a not unusual custom, into bas-reliefs of saints.

He saw Amy go by from a distance, however, with a group of the family about her. The children sported in advance, and with the elders among others was Sister Beatriz. How his heart beat as Amy went by! He fancied, from his remoteness, she looked pale. She leaned on the arm of Señora del Prado, too, as if she were not very strong.

“Can it be in any degree on my account?” he wondered. “If so, she is soon to be reassured.”

The company remained an hour or more—it was a pleasant rural spot where they might well enough pass a little time, though it in no way compared with the garden—and then he watched them on their return. As soon as the coast was entirely clear, he slipped out, and, shielding himself behind one straw-stack after the other, daringly risking detection, went and inspected the depository.

Nothing. He hid again in the corral, hoping she might make another visit in the afternoon, but looking once more in the evening, and yet again in the morning, he still found nothing. He thought



she had not been able to secrete an answer before her companions in the first instance, nor to return alone in the second. What was more natural? But now he could wait no longer; another day at the corral was not to be thought of.

Just as he was about to begin his *détour* of retreat, he saw issuing from the principal gates of Las Delicias a numerous cavalcade. There were armed servants commanded by the *caporal*, or principal herdsman, a man who wore a red handkerchief about his head in bandit fashion and was wont to claim to be the titular cacique of some extinct tribe, and there were *peons* carrying the implements needed to clear the road. Mules, bearing provisions for the company for some days, had the name of the hacienda embroidered on the broad crupper-bands in bright colors. A small escort of the leather-jacketed *rurales*, or country police, furnished by the Jefe Político, was also in attendance, whose arms and silver trappings jingled as they rode.

In the midst were seen General del Prado, Amy, Luz, Doña Beatriz, the Señoritas Arroyo, and some other persons of note from the town.

Several of the party wore such badges as were used on the occasion of the pilgrimage to El Jas-



min. Walter bethought him that this was the date of it. If it were a pilgrimage to El Jasmin on which they were bound, then let him turn back and pause a little in his vague plan.

He discreetly followed their course, his skill in woodcraft standing him in good stead. Time was really no great object with him now ; an opportunity would surely present itself, on such an excursion, to speak to her, and many things could be settled by word of mouth which could not be by a fitful, enigmatic correspondence.



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PILGRIMAGE TO EL JASMIN.

But two days after the impulsive disclosure of her affection for Walter, Doña Beatriz had sought the hacienda to disavow it, in a passion of confusion and remorse.

"My conscience was dead to every consideration that should have restrained me when I talked so," she said. "I had neither self-respect nor shame. I come to beg you to think no more of it, and never to breathe a word of it to any other person. Does he know?"

Amy was as non-committal as possible, to save her feelings, but she had to admit some portion of what had taken place.

"I hoped to be in time," said Beatriz, with a quivering sigh, and flushing deeply red in her shamefacedness. "It is a part of my punishment, then, that he knows. I must never see him again."

She shut herself up for a long time after this, in peculiarly close seclusion, keeping away from all



those she had known. The Arroyo ladies she naturally avoided most. Thus it resulted that she knew nothing of Walter's departure for the United States. Her sincere effort to do right in this struggle with herself was shown in her never making any inquiries for him. It was only by accident that she learned of it, and soon after that the two older Sisters, her companions, began to report that they feared her health would give out, and urged her forth to take more exercise.

Then she occasionally came again to the hacienda. It did not consist with the magnanimity of Amy to feel the jealousy that is said to be entertained by women who are rivals for the affections of the same man.

"Walter has traits to make him any woman's hero," she said; "he unites strength and courage with physical beauty, a generous heart, a frank and open character, and a considerate nature. He is a man such as all men ought to be when the race is perfected. What more natural than that she should feel so? Besides, what claim have I to vaunt myself over her? We are both in the hands of Providence, which will dispose of us in its own good way."

They spoke of him no more; but it was plain to



Amy whither her companion's fancies often wandered.

The trying days came when the basin by the glass pavilion no longer bubbled. As each one passed without the signal it was to Amy as if a definite portion of her vitality were daily subtracted. She would go many times in the day instead of one, to see if it might not take place at some different hour. She got Trinidad José and the little children also to watch the basin for her, alleging a great interest in the bubbling as a phenomenon.

As often as she deemed it safe, and oftener too, for she forgot her prudence in her anxiety, she went to the place of deposit for letters.

"Why do you go so much to the cross of the English governess?" the family asked her.

"Her fate interests me, and the walk is a change from the gardens, which sometimes seem too splendid, and there are plenty of *maravillas* [a pretty blue wild flower] there."

On one occasion as they—the women over their embroidery—sat by the basin that did not bubble, the *Madre* said, casually:

"It seems a long time since Don Walter went away: he is an acquaintance that one misses."



Amy could hardly forbear crying out, "He is dead! his bones are whitening in a terrible place! Or he is in danger, and nobody will help him, and I am to blame because I will not tell what I know!"

It was the tenth day since the basin had given any sign. The effort to keep back the agony of her mind was growing almost impossible. She was continually arguing with herself:

"Surely time enough has now been allowed to go by. Why did he not fix an exact limit? Now I *will* write to Captain Perez; but no, what horror to betray his plan and ruin all, if there should be no need of it! A dozen things that could not have been foreseen may have taken him away. Why did we not talk more fully and arrange all that in advance?"

The lengthened suspense had made her so pale and wan that all noticed it.

"You are not well," said the General; "you are not keeping up to the standard. We must find some new distraction or change of air for you. What would you like? Suppose we run up to Mexico for a few days."

"No, no," she protested, in a panic; "I am perfectly well."



"Then we might ride up to this pilgrimage at El Jasmin, near the Barranca of Cimarron. The anniversary has come round, and the *Madrecita* here," slightly mocking at the opinions of his wife, "will tell you that it is a very important occasion."

Amy brightened at the mention of the Barranca of Cimarron.

"Would you like it?" he asked.

"Very much," she answered.

That would be life—movement. Anything was better than the torture of stagnation. She would leave Trinidad José to watch the bubbling of the spring for her, and she vaguely hoped, if she approached the Barranca, some providential way of hearing from him might be found.

It had been talked of before. Doña Beatriz and her companions had desired to go if they could place themselves under efficient protection, and she was here this very morning to learn the decision of the Señora. The General being thoroughly enlisted, it required no long time to make the necessary preparations. Swift messengers were despatched to town, to do what was needed there, and all was got ready for an early start next morning. As the group went back through the garden-mazes, Amy turned almost involuntarily for her usual



walk out through a side gate in the hedge. One and then another of them decided to accompany her, though it would have been much more to her liking to have the children alone.

Beatriz, too, had noticed her devotion to the walk, and even her peculiar proceedings at the cross. This time, while Amy, not to seem to go there too directly, led the children away a little distance, Beatriz, whether out of pure goodness of heart and desirous to be first in decorating the cross, or obeying some secret suspicion, went to it before her. The cross was of wood, with a rude canopy, and had vines running up the post, on which hung three red earthen-ware pitchers.

She had in her hand a bunch of the beautiful white flowers of St. John. She was about to put them in the largest of the pitchers, when, she knew not by what extraordinary intuition, she first thrust her hand down into it. A crisp paper crackled at her touch. With great self-control, she gathered it up with her white nosegay, which she carried then by a natural gesture to her breast. Acting upon a second thought, she left no flowers behind her in the pitcher except some faded ones already there, and it was all done with such deft rapidity that when Amy turned around she was with the others



at a large ceiba-tree, and no indication of what she had done remained.

Amy's own visit was made with more difficulty. She waited a good half hour before she could feel sufficiently free from observation. She looked in. Nothing there. That was singular, for she recognized with an exulting throb that her own had gone. Perhaps Walter had been surprised at the moment of effecting the exchange, perhaps he had been obliged to leave his missive behind him, or had been unable to write one in the wanderings in which he might now be driven about. She had no reason to suspect anybody; had not her former letters, and this one too, lain there week in and week out undisturbed? At any rate, hers was gone, Don Walter had it, he had been near her, she was reassured as to his safety, and in tolerable peace of mind she could await the clearing up of the rest.

She was no longer so eager for the expedition, but no pretext could now be found for abandoning it. As for Doña Beatriz, she assured herself, singularly moved:

"Where Amy is, *he* will not be far distant."

The procession moved slowly up the mountain. Now and again there was a halt while the advance made some parts of the way more practicable for



ladies than they had been. Walter hung on the skirts of it, but the opportunity of which he was in search did not present itself before the village was reached. He fell back, therefore, to await his chance. He mingled with other peasants going up. In the course of talk with them he became sensible that there was an uneasy political feeling in the air; people were dreading that something was about to happen, they hardly knew what or why. The government at Mexico was committing many unwarranted and arbitrary acts, a sign of weakness and by no means of strength, and vague rumors of revolution came from the North.

The pilgrimage church of El Jasmin had a few arches remaining of what had once been a beautiful sculptured gate-way. It had perhaps been established where it was as a counteracting influence to pestilent local superstitions, and especially to the worship of a serpent-idol in a large cave near there.

It stood on a gentle rise of ground, facing the plaza, and there was attached to it a chapter-house, or kind of sacred hostelry, for the accommodation of pilgrim guests. In this last a few camp-beds, that had been brought for the more delicate travellers, were set up, while the hardy were fain to be content with spreading their blankets and some



disused carpets on the brick floor. The long rooms had scarce any other furniture, save very dark old paintings, which it had not been thought worth anybody's while to take away.

The glimpse of a half-mediæval life she had at this place would have charmed Amy, if her anxiety had suffered her to take her usual interest in such things. As it was, there was need of all its strangeness to make it a distraction. Sometimes she looked on at the pilgrims in their devotions, sometimes rode with Don Angel short distances round about—her fancy galloping faster than the steed toward the unattainable Barranca of Cimarron—and sometimes strolled with Beatriz a little into the village street. The men of the village were highly respectful to all those who wore the insignia of pilgrimage, and most of the women and girls were taking part in it themselves.

Don Walter took up a lodging in a wattled hut, furnished only with a few large earthen jars and a charcoal fire-place in the centre, and slept on mats like any peasant. For some reason the religious observances were much better attended this year than usual. Delegations of Indians, in their distinctive local dress, were present from a number of remote points. Walter prowled among them, looking from



a distance at his nearest friends and connections, like one from the dead. He came inadvertently upon Amy and Beatriz face to face, as they were issuing together from behind the sculptured arches. Changed though he was by long exposure in the cañon and by his disguise, Doña Beatriz recognized him at once.

“Don Walter!” she exclaimed, with an impulsive cry. “Don Walter, is it you?”

“I call myself Ignacio Gomez. There is some mistake here. I am in search of cattle that have strayed in these parts,” he responded, endeavoring to retreat.

“No, no, you are Don Walter: I cannot be mistaken. You have not gone to the North: you are here and in hiding. Perhaps you are in trouble and danger. Oh, can I not help you?”

“Do you not see that this good man is a mere peasant? What a singular idea you have got in your head!” said Amy to her, severely. “Do not be offended with us, good friend: my companion here sometimes likes to talk at random.” And she took her gently by the arm to draw her away.

She checked her own feelings with wonderful calmness, in order to protect him.

But one of the painful thoughts by which Walter



immediately began to be troubled was that she also had not recognized him. He had clearly seen the surprise dawn and grow on her face. The intuition of Beatriz was the quicker. They separated, but it is certain that all looked forward to another interview that might gratify the special desire of each.

Sister Beatriz, struggling with a strange mixture of motives, being there partly to pray against her own weakness and partly drawn on by her heart, would not absent herself from the presence of Amy.

The second day of their stay was coming to its close: they were to leave on the morrow, and Walter had made no progress. He called to him an Indian woman, bearing a jar of water on her head.

"Amiguita, there are some Sisters of Charity over there, or Sisters of some kind or other," said he to her. "You have a great deal of respect for them, have you not, though the government treats them so roughly?"

"Yes, indeed I have," replied the woman, sturdily.

"And you would like to hold some improving conversation with them, would you not?"

"Yes, I would like that too; but they can't be expected to pay much attention to such as I."



"I think it would have a good effect on your soul's salvation. I am so anxious to have you enjoy this benefit that I will give half a dollar if you will go and select the handsome young Sister sitting on the bench yonder at the door of the chapter-house and engage her in talk for ten minutes. I will double the amount if you make it fifteen."

"They have no worldly ideas. Well, you are a forward one, you are."

"That's it, that's it: I see you understand what I mean," in a hearty confidential way. "This is a perfectly straight affair."

The woman was puzzled, but there was the silver awaiting her, and even a portion of it already in her hand as an earnest.

"At the same time, if the moment you begin to talk to her you carefully drop this note in the lap of the lady sitting next to her—the one with the bright hair—that is another dollar. You see, I can afford it, as I act for somebody else. Who it is makes no difference either to you or me. These comfortable *caballeros* can pay well for their nonsense."

The woman went and set down her jar, reappeared with a small tray of fruit, and proceeded on her mission. Amy was presently aware of a robust



Indian woman in *reboso* and petticoat of the blue stuff woven in the place pushing almost rudely between her and Doña Beatriz and addressing some affecting appeal for sympathy to the latter. At the same moment a note fell in her lap. It was of about the following purport :

“Can the Señorita see for a moment the poor man she has sometimes aided, who speaks a little English? He is at the bells, and they are easily reached by passing through the house and out the main door of the church.”

Amy slipped within on the instant. Beatriz was detained behind by the mystery in the woman's manner and then by a persistence that amounted almost to force.

The bronze bells of the quaint rococo church had been taken down from their tower, which had been ruined by an earthquake, and set up temporarily in a low rustic pavilion. Walter was there.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PASSION OF SISTER BEATRIZ DE RIVERA.

“How worn and ill you look!” said Amy at once on greeting him. “Is it real, or only a part of your disguise?”

“Some of it may be real—but let us not talk of that; time is too short: let us talk of yourself.” He was looking at her with timidity and misgiving, aided by the effect of the poor peasant attire he wore, to see if perchance he might divine some results from the confession he had made her.

“*Pobre!*”—using the Spanish word of sympathy, caught up familiarly from her companions—“no, we must talk of you. Oh, what a strange way to meet! Tell me at least that you have been successful, that all is going well!”

“No, at present it is going very ill; the end seems put off to a very long time,” he said, with the despair of failure in his heart. “It was for that I wanted to see you, to arrange for the future, to make some new little plan of action.”



“But you speak of *failure* and of these millions you have gained in the same breath?” she said, repeating the figures he gave her, and catching at this as something tangible. “The amount is one that makes my poor brain dizzy. It is already a magnificent success.”

“It is a mere drop in the bucket,” he rejoined, bitterly, after his usual way of looking at it. “Surely the state of affairs and the reasoning presented in my letter can have made but little impression upon you.”

Thus the letter came to be spoken of, and its loss was discovered. Amy raised her small hand to her forehead in a gesture of consternation. As is a common experience, they could not at once verify the exact date and fix all the attending circumstances through which it might have been accounted for. With Walter there was one redeeming feature in it. He had felt a little involuntary resentment when she tried to comfort him by representing his defeat as victory, and he was glad, after all, the confession had not reached her. He experienced a proud revulsion of feeling on the whole subject, and something more of his self-esteem returned to him, now that she did not know who he was and to what tragic history he was bound.



"Yes, as events have turned out, it will be best that nothing of it should ever be known till success is certain," he mentally decided.

Still, the letter had gone astray, and, though unsigned and in some respects enigmatic, there was no telling what new element of danger might not be involved in its loss.

While they were still animatedly discussing the loss of the letter, the Indian fruit-seller came around the corner and sent Walter a shrill warning in the form of a snatch from a ballad.

"Time is passing, time up," she sang; "those who do not buy my fruits when they are ripe may regret them when they are withered."

"Where next—where next can we meet?" demanded Walter. "Is there no way? In another moment we may be watched, interrupted."

"I can think of only one plan. I might come down to the church very early in the morning, even before the devotees, and pretend to be one of them. You could kneel near me, and we could talk in English without appearing to be communicating with each other."

"Then, quick! to-morrow, if you will; I shall be there even before daylight." And they parted.

His messenger followed him to claim her reward.



Afterward she went and talked about him to an *arriero*, Perfecto Ponce, whom we have briefly seen as the friend and critic of Antonio Gassol in the first chapter. This man had come up among the bands of pilgrims.

"Is he one of the schoolmates? Does he know the time of day, since he does such peculiar things?" she asked, in mysterious phraseology.

"I'm not quite sure that he is of the society," replied the other, equally obscure. "We must look him up; we must keep an eye on him."

Afterward who should come up to Walter but his old servant, the dismissed Pablo! This fellow, so stupid otherwise, had some animal-like scent for identities, and began to peer at him in the same investigating way as before.

"You look like a better man," said he, suddenly, meaning no doubt to test him.

"I wish I could say as much for you, my friend, though we are all made in God's image and likeness. You will find that in your catechism."

Walter thoroughly understood the ways and speech of the lower class, and could adapt himself to them at need in humorous, rollicking fashion. He had a gift of mimicry, too, with which in gay



moods he would amuse his friends, and he drew upon this in disguising his voice.

Pablo was apparently puzzled, but not convinced. But twilight was drawing on, and at this moment, from under the wide curtain draping the main doorway of the church, issued forth the saint's procession, which was the main feature of the festival. A large female figure, in black velvet gown, silver-adorned, with joined hands and a tearful, pleading expression, was carried around the plaza on a platform amid a multitude of attendants with lighted candles. She tottered under the unsteady motion of the shoulders that bore her, and the countenance, looking down, had a very real and human aspect.

Amid such a *mêlée*, for they were near the front, it was not difficult to slip away, and for the morrow he made some further changes in his personal appearance.

He was in the church at the very first gray of morning. Amy did not come down for a long time. He grew impatient, alarmed. The sky was pink instead of gray, and their last opportunity was passing.

"I could not get away before without arousing suspicion," she said, when, panting with haste, she



finally appeared. "Luz, her mother, and Beatriz were in the same room with me; some of them were awake, and I had to wait till they slept again. I doubt if Doña Beatriz had slept all night; and you saw yesterday how quick she is to penetrate one's plans."

"Could it be anything *more* than quickness?" queried Walter, and they returned to the subject of the letter gone astray.

Amy repudiated the idea. They could discuss nothing thoroughly, but dashed from one topic to another. Walter repeated hurriedly the same account of events in the cañon which he had before written, and then spoke of the uncertain future.

"Do not look any more for the regular bubbling of the spring," said he. "I have told you of my present plan, and there is no saying henceforth where I shall be or what I shall do. Nor will it do to trust to letters again."

"And I shall not hear from you? You will disappear utterly?"

"If my new attempt does not succeed, perhaps I shall soon reappear in my own person; concealment would be no longer of any use. But I will try to find some means of keeping you in mind of me. It may be possible to use a messenger. By



those whom it is delightful to remember we do not wish to be forgotten."

Amy was burning to tell him feelingly of her sympathy and distress for him in his hardships, her warm belief in his final triumph, and her desire to be patient and strong for his sake, but it was too late; people came and interrupted, and Walter went away with a little impression of coldness on her part. The horses were already stamping without, and he overheard Don Angel summon her with boyish impatience, saying:

"Well, are you not ready? The sun is half an hour high: we ride early here in the tropics, and we must be off."

The Arroyo ladies were among the other worshippers by this time, and it seemed to him he could not escape detection should those familiar eyes fall upon him. To avoid them, he went out by a small door through which the flaming eastern heavens could be seen above the vegetation of a courtyard. His investigations had already shown him there was an exit to a lane. Around the courtyard was an arcade of the usual sort, and on the top of one of the stuccoed walls, stained lees-of-wine color, was a small belvedere.

Doña Beatriz, who might have just come in or



might have been obscured by a column, glided into the cloister after him, and, touching his arm, addressed him in a most agitated way. As before, he was disposed to deny his identity, but she persisted.

“Do not be afraid of my betraying you,” she said. “I am prudent. I pass my whole time here only in praying for your welfare and safety; could I then be capable of endangering you? You have trusted your secret to her; oh, I beseech you, let me—who would do so much more for you, who would give my heart’s blood for you—let me also have some share in serving you.”

“This from you, Sister Beatriz?”

“It cannot be wholly a surprise to you, for Amy has told you of my feelings.”

“She has; but I could not find it in my heart to believe it of Doña Beatriz, whom I have always looked upon as the sweetest and most perfect of saints.”

“Call me saint and perfect no longer, unless it be saintly to worship an earthly hero and type of gallant boldness who well deserves it. I am changed; your words have sunk deeply into my mind: I believe nothing or everything just as you would have it. I belong no more to the religious



life, and in the great world what can I do if you are not with me ? ”

“ Tell me, Doña Beatriz,” said her companion, gently, touched—as what man could fail to be by such an all-pervading, uncalculating affection ?—“ how you knew I had confided my secret to Doña Amy ? ”

She blushed with the ingenuousness of one little used to duplicity, yet replied, boldly :

“ I found the letter at the cross of the English governess. I did not know what or from whom it was at first, but I suspected. It was not till I heard you declare yourself Ignacio Gomez that it was all clear to me beyond a doubt.”

“ And you openly avow you took a letter that was not yours and did not return it even when you knew to whom it belonged ? ”

“ There was one excellent reason why I did not return it,” she persisted. “ No, I could not. My heart bled for you on divining that confession. I could not bear that you should humiliate yourself before her. Dear Don Walter, you are too high and noble to be an object of condescension to anyone in the world.”

Walter winced before this commendation, this touching of the sore spot even by such as she.



"As for me," Doña Beatriz went on, "it brings you but the nearer to me. This painful secret needs no apology for me: to know you have suffered makes you only the dearer."

Surely here was a strong appeal; there was a great sense of rest to him in knowing his secret shared and yet no odium falling upon him on account of it; but more was to follow.

"You have suffered her to aid, and yet it was I who was far the stronger. Listen, dearest Don Walter: you are in want of very great resources; I now know the reason why. Well, I, even I, might give them to you. If I could command a treasure sufficient for all your needs, would you share it with me?"

"Does all the world think of nothing else but treasure?" he cried, as if this were only a kind of spectre conjured by her out of his own thoughts. "And you, poor Sister Beatriz, what have you to do with such things?" He looked at her commiseratingly, and began to doubt her sanity.

"It is in my power, poor and weak as you think me. Nobody can hear us: I speak of the treasure of my convent, buried securely away against the greed of the selfish men who would have robbed us of that as of everything else."

She no doubt saw his face change, and went on



hurriedly, ardently, as if she saw him yielding: "I trust you at once, though no one else knows it: I can have no fear of you. It is close by the spot you cleared for us in our old garden of Santa Rosa. It is buried in the foundation-wall, and made a part of it, so that they might dig the whole place over and never find a trace of it."

"Is it yours to give, Doña Beatriz?"

Again she flushed most deeply. "To use it for your mission would be right," she replied. "To whom, indeed, does it really belong? It can never again be used for the religious purposes for which it was designed. The survivors of the convent—who are very few—have no right to use it in luxurious living, even if their inclinations did not forbid. If it be seized it will not go to the service of the state, but to feed individual rapacity. Then, to what better end than the one you have in view is it ever likely to be devoted? Take me with you," she pleaded. "You have always been so good to me, I belong to you and not to myself."

Walter was convinced that her statement was true; many small circumstances from the past wove themselves together to strengthen the conviction. It needed a strong motive indeed to resist so dazzling a temptation. Nor was it purely mercenary,



for the charms of Doña Beatriz were great, and one could foresee how she would develop under freedom, which she would enjoy with the zest of an escaped bird, and but now he had thought Amy cold. But motive somewhere there was that gained the victory even over so many combined allurements. A crippled beggar, from the church-door, here shuffled up closer to them, asking for alms. Walter motioned him away, and they too moved somewhat further on, in the cloister.

“I cannot share it with you ; I cannot take it,” he responded. “Give up these strange ideas, and be again the unworldly little Beatriz I have always liked.”

“You cannot take it ! Oh, I felt it would be so. But tell me why, why ?” she besought.

A worse man would perhaps have been kinder on the surface, but Walter was master, even in such a case, of some of that Spartan firmness which fits one for great things.

“It is best to say it plainly : to accept it, I ought to love you,” he replied ; “and, while I admire and esteem you most warmly—as no man could help doing—I do not love you.”

She bent as if before a heavy blow, covering her face a moment with both hands.



“There are those who hate if they are not loved,” she said, with a touching pathos, after commanding herself again. “I am not one of them. I can never wish to be revenged, nor think bitterly of you. Then take it without me. I can die. It shall never be said I imposed myself as a condition upon a means that may secure your happiness.”

Walter advanced toward her to take her hands and speak some kinder, more reassuring, words. But at this time, though the sky was blue and the sun bright, a strange, calamitous wind arose. The belvedere above the wall toppled into the court with a crash; the ground swayed and oscillated beneath their feet, and in some places was seen to open: one of the most severe earthquakes known in that district for years had ensued.

“It is a judgment,” cried Beatriz, who seemed stricken by a mortal terror. “The voice of heaven has spoken against me.”

Walter had to look on from a distance at the departure of Amy like the merest stranger. He saw that she had come to no harm. The company, recovering from their panic, more in haste to be off than ever, went away in a somewhat disorderly manner; many very anxious to see if any damage had been done at the hacienda.



In the shock several curious things had happened. The cripple in the corridor with Beatriz and Walter, for instance, had shown surprising activity. He made quite a normal use of his legs thereafter, and on returning to Cuernavaca reported to the Jefe Político that the Doña Beatriz had talked in a very animated way with a man who, though wearing a peasant's dress, did not appear to be a peasant. Upon his heels came Pablo, who had identified this peasant as the same one he half suspected to be Don Walter.

"Pooh! pooh! it is not probable," scoffed the Jefe Político. "Nevertheless, we will keep an eye out for these birds too."

And so it happened that if the first remote glance of scrutiny began to be cast toward Walter's own treasure it was because Beatriz had offered him hers.

He had got but a little way out of the place, in starting upon a renewal of his own journey, when he heard rumors that the disturbance had been particularly violent over in the direction of the Barranca of Cimarron. One informant, just down from Huetongo, said he had seen a mighty column of smoke arise from there and mount a prodigious distance into the air. All other anxieties were



swallowed up in the thought that he had better turn back and look to the safety of the property left behind.

He therefore took again to his devious routes. But, proceed cautiously as he would, he met a number of people prowling about in this district wont to be so lonely.

“Why is there such an unusual beating of the woods just now?” he asked, entering into confidential relations with one of them near Huetongo.

“The kidnappers are at their tricks again. Awhile ago they carried off Kaufmann, the foreman of the glass-works, around at Lake Jornada, and a reward is offered. It is said he has been seen over this way lately.”

“If Kaufmann has been carried off he keeps very cool about it,” commented Walter.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### CAPTAIN PEREZ'S REVOLUTION.

On re-entering the cañon, Walter saw at once that a cliff near his head-quarters had fallen. It might have been from this that the great cloud had gone up, which was dust rather than smoke.

The jar had acted chiefly along the central line of the chasm, opened new rents, dried up the bubbling lava of *La Caldera*, shaken his spring-house to ruin, and altered the aspect of the travertine basin and terraces. His cliff-caverns, with their treasure, were hardly disturbed.

It was only by his habitation, still intact, that he could recognize the place of his principal labors. What a wholesale change had taken place there! The central cairn was toppled over. There was no longer any cold spring. There was no more any hot spring; or at least the stream that now existed at a little distance could not be identified with the flood of boiling waters that used to surge so wildly around the spot.



The ever-rising hope in Don Walter's breast prompted him to look again to see if the Yellow Snake had not come back as one of the vagaries of the convulsion ; but nowhere was any glint of its dull golden lustre to be seen. It was not for some little time he realized that another haunting dream had actually come to pass ; the hot stream was turned out of its course. Its fierce caloric had no longer to be guarded against. There lay the wreck of his timber barricades and his conduit ; there lay the flat rock on which the Yellow Snake had been wont to sun itself, free and open now to whoever would approach. Below it was a cavernous depression filled with irregular fragments resembling those usually found in the vacant bed of a stream, some blackened with slime, others party-colored with chemical incrustations. But over the surface could be made out certain sinuous lines and vague suggestions of shapes that caused Don Walter's heart to stand still for a moment, then to beat with a force that made him dizzy.

He clambered down to the spot. It hardly needed his hammer and acids to verify what he found there. Everything pointed to the belief that he had discovered a large part, at least, of the nuggets formed by all the past plunging-over of



the golden stream. Let the Yellow Snake go now without a thought, for here was its progeny in limitless supply. Never, even at the time of the first discovery, had Walter been so overcome. The possibility that he might secure riches for himself, even after his honorable ambition was attained, now greeted him. Fulgurations seemed to dart before his eyes. He fell upon his knees in a mood of the sincerest piety.

"If I have been often rebellious under the scourging hand of heaven," he prayed, "let me now give devout thanks and the most heart-felt gratitude when it is so good to me. Hereafter I will mend my ways."

In two days he was able to take out enough from this new source to complete the coveted amount, and not a little over. From each of his trips to the caverns he brought back sections of dried trees and branches and threw them upon the deposit to give an appearance of natural wreckage. The bed would hardly have attracted the attention of a superficial eye as it was; but he wished to make assurance doubly sure.

The evening of the second day, he thought he saw armed men and horses silhouetted on the lofty verge of the Barranca, like the gods of Walhalla



riding in the sky. He fancied this must be only a deceptive appearance of the bushes, as before ; but this time it was a portent that was to be corroborated by extraordinary events.

What was his amazement, on returning from his usual mission the following day, to see two armed men in the cañon on the very field of his operations, and two horses picketed at a little distance ! One of the men climbed up to him from the cavernous bed of the stream, the other appeared from behind his hut.

He recognized the first as Captain Perez, the other as Antonio Gassol, keeper of the Alma de México restaurant at Cuernavaca.

These are the shocks that shorten men's lives ; and Walter had had so many of them crowded into his late experience that he showed clearly the effects of the rack and strain.

Captain Perez advanced toward him in a hearty way with extended hand. Walter was inclined to lay his own upon his revolver instead. He drew back repellantly, and kept on the defensive.

" Ah, you do not like our intruding ? " said the Captain.

" Oh, as to that, " shrugging his shoulders, " we



don't have a great many visitors here, and it was a trifle unexpected."

He felt the impolicy of his conduct, yet had been too flustered and was too tremblingly alive to the magnitude of the interests at stake to have adopted any other.

"So you are not in the United States, after all?"

"Good-day, Señor Arroyo! We do not see you often at the Alma de México nowadays, Señor Arroyo," interrupted Antonio Gassol, coming up with a most obsequious politeness. Walter turned fiercely toward him.

"He is all right," interposed Perez, assuming a confidential relation. "Antonio is one of those persons whom it is perfectly proper to trust."

"I am from this part of the country," explained Gassol; "so I return once in a while to see how my native village is getting along. We have come down——"

"Yes, to see if we could get some sulphate of copper, to use in my arrastra at La Fortuna," said his principal, cutting him short. "I pound out a few dollars from the ore on my place when I have nothing else to do. Antonio, will you kindly go and take a look at the horses? The roan seems to have tangled himself up in his lariat."



"You do not appear surprised to find me here," said Walter.

"I make it a rule not to be surprised. So many remarkable things are always happening, I have left myself little capacity for it. You were quite mysterious in your goings and comings for some time, then your horse turned up, giving us all a scare lest you had been murdered, and finally I learned the other day that a peasant corresponding to your description had been heard earnestly talking English with the fair American of the hacienda of Las Delicias. I put this and that together, and made up my mind you were not in the North American Republic, but still in our own. I did not know where, of course; but in the hut, just now, I recognized some of your property—pardon me for entering it without permission, but I thought it deserted—and presently I saw you walking toward me as natural as life."

Somewhat confused at this calm way of taking it, Walter muttered something about a scientific mission that had had no great results.

"Yes, a bright, hard metal that looks even finer than the real gold?" suggested Perez.

"But goes off chiefly in fumes and turns out to



be only sulphuret of iron. I don't mind admitting that my search was partly for treasure."

"And again, the bluish galena, containing silver, but in too small supply to be worked, and then the yellow grains scattered through some of the limestone, but still in too slight quantities to pay for extraction?"

"How do you know all that?"

"Bless you, I've been through it myself. I could have posted you if you had come to me. You may not recollect my telling you I had been here once, long before you were born. But, now, how about this bed close by? it seems to contain some very good nuggets. Are they of the same sort as those I noticed on the shelves in your cabin?"

Walter, in fierce agitation and resolve, here drew forth his revolver without further hesitation. The secret was out: he was betrayed.

"What I have found I have a special use for. I cannot give it up, nor even share it. If you have come here with design upon it, let us settle it once for all. Do you take your pistol, as I will mine, and stand off at twelve paces. Gassol will make as good a second as another. Whatever of value is here shall belong to the survivor."



"Have you, then, no more confidence in me than this, my old friend?" inquired the Captain, showing no trace of resentment. "You who knew my devotion to you should have treated me better."

"No, not in such an affair. I feared the temptation might be too great, not for you alone, but for any man. I had an object. If it had been an ordinary matter——"

"But it is precisely in extraordinary matters that I am most to be trusted. You should have known me better than my enemies. Whatever else I have done, my integrity has never been impeached. In all my campaigning, I have never once engaged in plunder. A man's virtues are much according to his temperament, I suppose; and my weakness does not lie in that direction."

Don Walter began to breathe more freely, and even to be a little ashamed.

"See here, now, what claim have you on me? What service did you do for me when you were the merest kid?" went on Perez, with cordial bluntness.

"I don't remember," answered the young man, evasively.

"Well, I will remind you. I was a captive in



the hands of my bitterest foes, who were taking me along to certain execution. They camped over night alongside the ranch where you lived then with your father. You were a lad and allowed to run freely about the camp. I asked you if you had a knife and could cut leather. You said you had, and used it upon the thongs with which I was bound—I feel their infernal, cramping knots now—so that at a favorable moment I was able to escape.”

“It was no trouble to me.”

“But it was a way of sparing me such a very considerable trouble that I have wanted to do you a good turn ever since. Putting you in the line of a little hunting does not fill the bill. Estimate the thing as I do. Now, here you are in a difficult and dangerous box, perhaps even more dangerous than you know: let me help you out of it.”

His hearer struggled with a lurking doubt whether this were not, after all, only a specious means of throwing him off his guard.

“I put myself at your disposal squarely, honestly, without a shadow of reserve: I will aid you to the best of my ability and by every means in my power.”

“I am conquered; I am overwhelmed with



shame," said Walter. "I trust you entirely. Forgive me! And see, Perez, what I have gained here is destined for a high and worthy end, in which my enjoyment has no part, but after that end is accomplished there will be something over, which you must share. And, further than that, much more of this liberal bounty of nature still remains, to become available at some future time."

"We will do nothing of the kind. Believe it who will, money has never had any temptation for me, and it is now too late to change. Look at me: what I most wanted in youth I could not have, and after that—— Well, suffice it to say I am a rude fellow, and at present I have other affairs. You may hear more of them anon."

"You knew my father, and, as I have reason to think, the cause of his coming here," said Walter, huskily. "Well, I want to pay it all back."

"I did not ask your object. I was willing to help you, no matter what it was."

To Walter, lonely and buffeted about as he had been, there was a blessed relief in having this strong shoulder to lean upon; and never was he to have any reason to regret the confidence he now bestowed.

He summed up the vague plans he had thought of



for getting the treasure out of the country, feeling only the more clearly how hopeless it would have been for him to attempt it alone. In answer to a suggestion that it should be safely buried to await some change of government that might be more favorable to them, he said :

“I haven’t a single moment’s peace while it remains in Mexico. My idea is that, without waiting to secure any more at present, I ought to reappear in my own proper person, as if returned from my trip, and take every measure to get it to the United States at once.”

“To the United States? that is a long way. Still, I suppose a ton or two of the commodity might be run through to the coast.”

“A ton or two? but, my dear friend, a single million weighs nearly two tons, and I have over six millions. There will be freight enough for seventy or eighty mules, allowing twelve arrobas, of twenty-five pounds each, per mule.”

“Six millions! Well, that is something,” cried the Captain, opening his eyes widely at the unexpected amount, but making a prodigious effort to hide his surprise. “In fact, it is a very pretty sum. And all that has to go for a benevolent object? It does not seem treating yourself quite



fairly. If it had been my case, I think I should have drawn off a little more of the golden milk for my own benefit."

"You are forgetting that the supply gave out, though there is no telling what there may be in these beds beneath us yet. I may have half a ton or so extra for contingencies. You must certainly take a liberal share of this, and no doubt in better times the beds can be worked, when the product shall be as much yours as mine. I cannot tell you what a source of chagrin it is to me now not to be able to offer you one-half of the whole."

"No more of this, my boy. Nothing shall be deducted from the amount except for necessary expenses. Take your treasure for which you have toiled in such an unheard-of way? not I, indeed!"

"We will discuss that point afterward."

"It's a clear case," said Perez, resuming a blunt, peremptory manner; "there is just one thing to be done, and nothing else. We must get up a revolution."

"How? A revolution?" protested Walter, in complete repugnance and alarm.

"And carry it away under cover of the ensuing difficulties."

"I would never consent to anything so infamous



for a scheme of private advantage. It would be worse than to lose it all."

"Well, that is my way; I am at home there, and speak only of what I know," rejoined the Captain, coolly. "Why, to convoy such a train of animals as you need requires a regular military operation."

"Say no more: it can never be done. This is the sort of morality that might have justified my distrust of you, Perez."

"Wait a little, friend Walter: what if, instead of starting a revolution, we found one already made?"

"How can that be? Please explain."

"You have given me your confidence, and I will give you mine—just as sure it will be held sacred. Why do you think I am here?"

"One might guess fifty times and never strike it."

"Ostensibly to look for Kaufmann, the abducted foreman, for whose recapture a reward has been offered, but really to see what kind of place this would be for keeping out of sight a body of men till they were wanted."

"If Kaufmann has been abducted he takes it very easily," said Walter, as he had thought before, describing his adventure with that person not long ago.



“To be sure he does : he is one of the society—one of our college chums, as it were. His disappearance was only a piece of diplomacy, and he has his work to do elsewhere.”

Walter gave a slight whistle.

“It kindles still more the flame of discontent against the government at Mexico, on the ground of the prevailing lack of security for person and property ; though, to be sure, there are valid complaints enough without inventing them. What do you think it did the other day?—broke into Mr. Wharton’s house, at the capital, and took from his coffers, though they were under the seals of the British legation, seven hundred thousand dollars. Just before that, their general at Tepic seized twenty mule-loads of silver, under pretext that it was being clandestinely exported. Another time a whole conducta of two million dollars, on the way to Tampico, was confiscated ; repayment was promised when the troubles in that part of the country were settled. It will be a long time, I can tell you, before that day comes. Things are in a desperate way, and no mistake.”

“And the meaning of all this is——?”

“That a new era is dawning for our unhappy country. Our central committee at Mexico has



long been pulling the wires ; the proclamations are prepared ; the blow is about to be struck. My old general, my hero, my idol, has returned." He looked cautiously around, hardly daring to breathe the secret even in such a place. "When we fought for him before, he did not have a fair chance, but this time he will succeed. He will put an end to these wretched dissensions, and give Mexico at last a government worthy of the name."

"When? When is it to be? for I have those to whose safety I must look. In my hermit life here I have heard nothing of all this."

"You would have heard scarcely more if you had been outside, for the secret has been excellently kept. Nothing is yet felt here beyond a vague uneasiness. The besotted government itself, rushing from one folly to another, does not appreciate the importance of the crisis. But I have means of knowing that the States of Durango, Jalisco, and Michoacan are already aflame, and the signal may be expected here at almost any moment."

"With such pressing interests awaiting you, I can hardly expect your attention to my affair."

"On the contrary, your affair is likely to be a godsend to us : you see the obligation will not be



all on one side. The appointed date has been postponed on account of the sickness of our chief, and to give time for the ferment at the North. I was left at Rio Frio with a large force of men who had been gathered in ready for the outbreak, and with nothing for them to do. I sent part of them in various bands on the pretext of making the pilgrimage to El Jasmin, and with another part I have affected to take service under the Jefe Político and search for Kaufmann. Don Thomas Corcovedo and I are, for the nonce, better friends than we used to be," he added, with a laugh.

"He is a dangerous man, not so stupid as he seems, and in dealing with him you are running a great risk."

"He is nervous about the state of the country just now, and seems glad of any even apparent accession to the armed force of which he is the head. He will be more arrogant again when he receives the reinforcements he expects to keep his district in order."

"I shall be extremely grateful for any aid you may give me consistent with your own project. What do you propose?"

"While my men are idle they are likely either to desert or get into some serious mischief that will



betray us. I propose that they give up the farce of playing at pilgrims, come down here, and transport your property on their backs. We may bring down a few mules, too; our horses showed that the path was practicable. My idea is that the gold ought to be outside the Barranca at some point where it could be easily accessible, if an opportunity should offer, for a rapid dash to the coast."

"What point would you suggest?"

"You say you have some of it hidden on the shore of the lake, and more of it at Cuernavaca. Why not collect it all at Rio Frio? That is my head-quarters, beyond the jurisdiction of your treacherous Jefe Político, the scene selected for the uprising, and a convenient point of departure for a military movement to the sea."

"And after that?"

"The rest will naturally need planning somewhat as we go on. I have a friend, Captain Carvajal, who has a schooner on the coast, engaged in our business. I don't mind telling you that he brought back the Liberator from his exile. He himself must be somewhere near Puebla now, having come up to visit his family. I will open communications with him and try to see him personally. Carvajal is a Biscayan by birth, a bold fellow



who has been in all sorts of hazardous undertakings, and if we can get him he will be just our man."

"Good!" assented Walter, heartily. "The difficulties of the enterprise seem to be already clearing away. But, naturally, it cannot be conveyed openly all at once; it must go piecemeal, by strategy. And are you sure your men can be trusted? Will it do to let them know what they are dealing with?"

"Of course not. They must never see a sign of it. They are only to think they are transporting arms and supplies for the cause, disguised as sulphate of copper. They are not up in fine points of weight and the like. We must keep the boys well paid, and then they can be depended upon. It will be a delightful novelty for them, and nobody will get ahead of us on that score."

Perez charged himself with turning some of the ingots into cash for the expenses of the expedition. They began at once to make their preparations and plan the necessary subterfuges.

"And Gassol?" inquired Walter, with some concern.

"He has seen nothing of consequence, I feel sure. I kept my discoveries to myself. I will make



him think your being here is a part of the plan. He is true as steel, and has been with us all along. His place was a convenient point for reunions, and he has been the means of bringing in some of his old cronies—for instance, Perfecto Ponce above, to whom, with your permission, we will now send up a few signals.”

He and Gassol thereupon set up some flags.

A messenger hastily came down, and was sent off again. Almost immediately after there began to steal into the cañon a number of peons, such as had been seen about El Jasmin. They brought with them the various cages and other contrivances used by the charcoal-burners, potters, and market-people generally for carrying their burdens; it was intended that the valuable freight should be disguised under a variety of forms.

The men who came from another part of the country, with the example of their bold leaders before them, and being gathered for a peculiar purpose, were far less troubled by the superstition of the Yellow Snake than those of the immediate neighborhood. Captain Perez, too, made a strong point in Don Walter's favor by representing that the latter had come there for the express purpose of destroying the monster's abode, and pointed out



the effects of the blasting to show that he had succeeded in doing so.

A good supply of maguey-fibre bags was also brought in, and Walter, with Perez, guardedly found means to pack all the treasure that had been piled in loose heaps into them in person. Under the eyes of so many witnesses they could take out no more treasure from the exposed bed. On the contrary, they devoted themselves to covering it up as much as possible. Nor could they have delayed for any further mining, since the conditions demanded the utmost haste.

"I think we shall do well to begin with a procession," proposed Captain Perez. "Religion has been used before now as a cloak for many a less worthy object."

"A procession?" repeated Walter, puzzled.

"Yes; our pilgrims will now naturally be going back to their homes. For a consideration, we can borrow a number of the figures of saints at El Jamin. We will fill the hollow interiors with our gold, and the figures can be conveyed in public parade to Rio Frio. There must be some pretext of a celebration, or, say, prayers for rain. It is a good while, in fact, since we have had rain enough in Rio Frio."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A PROCESSION FOR RAIN.

Antonio Gassol and Perfecto Ponce, as citizens of the district, took upon themselves to negotiate with the *cura* at El Jasmin for the loan of the statues. When the application was backed by the promise of a handsome present—guaranteed by Captain Perez—for the repair of the shrine, it was readily granted.

They took but a few of the best images, while a large number of old battered ones found in a lumber-room were utilized.

“It is desired to have the display as imposing as possible,” explained Gassol: “anything whatever from this esteemed locality will be most highly appreciated, and our friends fear the choicer figures might possibly come to some harm on the journey.”

A great deal of mystery was made about the preparations, which took place chiefly under cover of night. Only a small number of men were ad-



mitted with Perez and Walter to work in the courtyard of the chapter-house, reserved exclusively for this business. All was not complete till near morning. In the course of the night many mules stopped at the outer gate, and there was not a little bustling back and forth also by the other peons.

When the procession moved, many of the images were covered up with *petates*—a kind of burlap—some even sewn up entirely, so that only a vague suggestion of the forms remained. The pretext for this was to hide their battered condition while on the way. Though they were made of but thin metal, and therefore light, it was to be noted that their bearers carried them with sedate and labored tread, which observers might have taken for reverence.

There were women as well as men in the procession, and little knots and files of pretended market-people were scattered along before, behind, and mingling with it. The mountaineers carried large wooden crates on their backs, and aided their steps with long poles. Some staggered under heavy burdens of the home-spun goods of El Jasmin. The potters had loads of their great, ruddy jars piled high above their heads, the tops carefully covered that the contents might not be seen. Others were almost concealed in bales of *secate*, or



green fodder, like the Birnam wood that came to Dunsinane. Only a few armed men covered the movement, but under the dress of all were weapons concealed that would have made them most formidable adversaries if attacked.

The present train carried something like two-thirds of the treasure. Had there been force enough, Walter would have divided it, and moved the rest at the same time from the other end of the Barranca, picking up also on the way what he had hidden on the shore of Lake Jornada. Now, however, all that portion must be returned for and brought off by another trip.

"If all goes well," said Perez, "suppose I stay at Rio Frio to attend to my affairs, and communicate with Carvajal, while you come back for the remaining portion? Provided no suspicion is excited this time, it will be quite in order to use the same route again."

"A second procession?"

"Not at all; but bringing back the statues will give a sufficient excuse for getting some of the men here once more, and they must be fitted out as ordinary market-people, and the like. Keep me posted by trusty messengers, and I will meet you as you are coming down the pass. Then, if agree



able to you, I will take charge of the train, and you may go and bring off the portion left at the lake, for which we will have boats provided.

So it was determined. Perez, as knowing his men the best, assumed the general command; Walter rode near the middle of the line. Brooding solicitously over the safety of his treasure, he would have wished, had it been possible, to be in all places at once. He had now a new disguise, wearing a beard, but otherwise appeared in the usual costume adopted for adventurous expeditions. He wore a short jacket, a sombrero with silver braid, carried a carbine on his knee, pistols in his belt and holsters, and a large sabre clanking by his side. He passed for a lieutenant or superior *mozo* of Perez, hailing from another part of the country.

It was a gala day at Campo Florido when they debouched into that little hamlet. There was a *festa de flores*, or flower-festival, going on in honor of the patron saint, and traces of this were found almost all along the road to Cuernavaca, where the regular market-day was in progress. The trees were belted or garlanded with flowers, little trellises were set up here and there, music played, and small tables were laid out, on which, for the occa-



sion only, gambling was allowed, the municipality drawing a revenue from its exercise.

Amy, with some of the others, had come from the hacienda to see the novel sight. When the procession appeared, she was standing under a little pavilion by the great amape-tree near Doña Beatriz's home. The nun's house was closed, with an unusual air of seclusion. Naturally, they would not wish to look out on the gayety going on before them. Some of the rustics in good faith hailed Perez's troopers as coming back from the search after Kaufmann, and inquired what success.

"None? why, then the country is going to the dogs indeed," they said: "these villains of *plagiarios* (kidnappers) have everything their own way again."

Amy turned to General del Prado to ask their meaning, but he was evasive, as he was wont to be about all the political troubles, so as not to alarm her.

Nodding hedges of freshly-cut banana-plants adorned the sides of the street. Behind these the extraordinary defile of images presently hove in sight. Amy, in a certain consternation, at first thought it was dead bodies the men were carrying so solemnly in the stretchers on their shoulders,



but as they drew near she was undeceived. She found the spectacle quaint and original. The church-bells rang in honor of the festival—sometimes turning over and over as in ecstasy—and the gayety on the surface formed a contrast indeed, had one known the truth, with the real object of the burden-bearers, sweating under their heavy loads. These had a certain quiet enjoyment in their duplicity. They uttered in a sing-song way the usual peasant salutations as they went along.

“How do you do?—How is the family?—Did you pass a pleasant night?—May you pass a pleasant night this time!—Until a little while!—Adios!”

Trinidad José, who was there, with his dog behind him, took upon himself to answer these salutations for the General's party, ignorant of the spice of derision they contained. Presently the parade rested, and many of the men scattered from their ranks among the various attractions of the *fiesta*. Some of them had already judiciously taken an upper road leading eastward, but the main body were to proceed boldly through the city itself, as a course less likely to excite suspicion. General del Prado was called away for a moment on some matter of business. While flower-sellers particularly



engaged the attention of the rest, a horseman found opportunity to approach Amy and let fall guardedly a few words in English.

"You again, Don Walter?" she exclaimed. "Is not this too dangerous? What plan have you adopted now?"

"Everything is going well," he answered, reassuringly. "I hope soon to reappear in my proper person. Keep up good courage!"

Amy asked the General, thereupon, to take her to Cuernavaca also, and in the market-place of that town a few more words of similar purport were exchanged. Her recent depression was shaken off, and her heart beat with a kind of fearful gladness at the turn things had taken.

"What is the use of all this, anyway?" said the Jefe Político, coming up to some of the men with the statues, with perhaps a little more than his customary insolence, to impress the group from Las Delicias.

"When we have had no rain for some time over there," replied a spokesman, demurely, "we bring out the saints, and that always succeeds. Besides, we expect these from the holy place to have a peculiarly good effect."

"Don't you know the saints don't make the



weather, you? There's a people for you!" in great disgust. "The weather is made by—it is—er—for example, now—the full moon—the rotation of the sun—when you want to know anything about those matters, come to my office. I can tell you everything on science, absolutely everything."

"Yes, Excellency, henceforth we shall always do so."

"And, you know, you take a very lazy gait, you men, as if these things were heavy. You cumber up the market-place with them. I would guarantee to carry a whole one myself—— Ah, ten million devils! shoo! get away with you!"

He jumped back and made a cut with his whip at his namesake, Trinidad José's Corcovedo. The animal, either well trained in his master's hostility or sharing it by instinct, had taken advantage of the dignitary's bending posture to make a long-ing snap at his legs.

General del Prado apologized for the animal's misconduct, but the Jefe was furious and would not accept any apology.

"I can tell you it won't do to have your dogs snapping at the legs of a high official in times like these!" he exclaimed, savagely. "It behooves everybody to be thinking how he stands with the



government, instead of causing it annoyance and suspicion."

As the cackling of the geese saved Rome, this trivial incident prevented his making a discovery that might have resulted in very serious consequences. The men picked up their load again, and—especially as they had been enjoined to do so—vacated the plaza as soon as possible. They melted away insensibly, as it were, sloping down the side streets, stopping at various places to refresh themselves, and then taking to the road in small detachments. Antonio Gassol entertained many of them, and the Alma de México was for a time a scene of crowded animation. So also—that no invidious distinction might be remarked—was the Bella Union.

The market-people who had accompanied them vanished in like manner, not easily missed among the unusual throng in the place that day. The make-believe devotees had a particular head-quarters at a corral engaged by Perez, and from this corral just at dusk, and for some time after, a considerable number of mules issued forth, lightening the loads so that the march could be pressed with greater speed.

Needless to describe all the small incidents, de-



lays, and well-grounded fears that attended such a march. The general rendezvous was about ten miles to the east of Cuernavaca. The party camped there for the night, under some large forest trees. They were astir again at dawn, went on that day, and, waiting discreetly till the shades of the second night had fallen, entered Rio Frio. Their loads were deposited in a thick-walled *meson*, or caravansary, retained by Perez, around which a strong guard was posted. A semblance of a procession for rain was held the next day, and then the men, a few at a time, were sent back with the figures to El Jasmin.

Meanwhile, General del Prado, stung by the insulting words he had endured for a second time from the Jefe Político, started next morning for Mexico, to observe the complexion of affairs there, see how he stood with the government, and how he had best adapt himself to the coming troubles.

Thus two-thirds of the treasure was safe at Rio Frio. Don Walter Arroyo waited only to see it carefully bestowed, and then set out with a single servant behind him, and at nightfall entered Cuernavaca as having returned from the United States.

The aunts received him with open arms. They



accepted all his excuses with full confidence. He had come by a trading-vessel, it appeared, instead of the regular steamer, a more favorable bargain having offered in this way, and he had not written, in order to surprise them.

“But—this in confidence”—he said, “I must soon be off again to the United States. I hope it will not be for long. A business connection is open to me there which it would be injustice to myself to neglect.”

Alas! their wild bird had flown from the nest, and they feared it would be long indeed before he returned to it. To acquaintances Walter said he had little good to report of the United States—knowing this was the way in which he could best escape embarrassing questions—but excused himself from entering into much detail, on the score of pressing affairs awaiting his attention. Letting a day or two elapse for the sake of appearances, during which he found means of despatching the small hoard from his own house to Perez, he declared he must be off to visit the country property and his neglected ranch.

On the way he stopped to see Amy: now at last he could visit her openly. He had hardly been able to check his burning impatience till the time



came. What a long and delicious talk they held, in one of their fragrant bowers in the garden, on all the aspects of the case! They sat again by the spring that had befriended them, and looked off at the distant mountain-peak which seemed covered with powdered sugar in the warm tropical landscape. Since the earthquake the basin no longer bubbled, but in all other respects Las Delicias had escaped intact. How often had Amy sat there alone, a prey to the terrors of her imagination! how often had she fancied her friend lying dead in the wild Barranca, his hapless corpse fitfully illumined by the lava flames! She was rapt with enthusiasm now at his magnificent success. But all danger was by no means yet over, as appeared when, without betraying the secret of the political movement, he gave her an outline of his plans.

“We shall march in force from Rio Frio,” he said. “There we shall have mules, and our porters will be transformed into fighting-men. You used to profess a fancy for the romantic. Well, now I ask you to look at us a little in that way, for surely there is an element of romance in an expedition like ours.”

“But you will be in danger—ah, you smile; I could never make that have any weight with you;



but—but you do not wish to fight and sacrifice lives? Think how badly you will feel when you reach New York if anything of that kind has happened.”

“None but villains will try to stop us, and they will deserve whatever happens to them. The country will be all the better for their taking off. No one shall have this treasure while I live.”

“Oh, why will you talk so?” she appealed, lamenting. “Is it not true that ‘all that a man hath he will give for his life?’”

“Till this is over I do not feel that I have even begun to live,” he replied, gloomily. “But let us not discuss that. Before long, I trust, we shall meet in New York. When we meet there I shall have a wonderful story to tell you; but till then——”

Amy speculated tremblingly whether this was to be at last a disclosure of his love for herself, a love she so greatly craved.

They spoke of Doña Beatriz.

“She has hardly been seen in public since the return from El Jasmin,” said Amy. “She seemed terribly alarmed by the earthquake; she was even more depressed on the way down than I was, though I had all my other troubles besides to think



of. She is living in strict seclusion. I went there to try to find her the day of the *festa*, but Sister Praxedis brought me word she would see nobody. How she recognized you at El Jasmin remains the greatest of mysteries."

Walter told her of the intercepted letter—suppressing its purport—and then, little by little, as to one to whom all confidence is due, of the whole interview, except as to the place where the riches of the convent were buried; for this knowledge belonged to no one, not even to himself.

"And why did you not take this treasure, and this true affection?" asked Amy, genuinely marveling at him.

He remained stubbornly silent as to his motive.

He was asking himself speciously if it were not really his duty now to ask the right to throw his protection round her and watch over her during the approaching troubles.

"No, no," his fixed conviction still answered, "the time has not come: all may yet fail. No danger can come to her under the guardianship of this most influential family."

How peculiarly fair she was, even in spite of her worn look, after his long deprivation of the sight of her! how small a victory it would have seemed



for him to have overcome even far greater blandishments for her sake! Their hands trembled with agitation as they touched in parting.

What madness! what utterly unwarrantable conduct! what a yielding to temptation after all the severe resolutions he had but just now registered! Swayed by an impulse he could not control—one that seemed to gain the sweet girl as well—hardly knowing what he did, Walter took Amy fairly in his arms, held her rounded form for one delicious instant against his own, kissed her peach-like cheeks, her brow, her lovely hair, her lips.

“Don Walter!” she simply protested, in an indescribable murmur of gentle resistance that haunted him many a long day after like a refrain of music, or like one of those wafts of exquisite aroma sometimes bless the traveller in spring-time on a mountain road, coming from what quarter he knows not, nor given out by what unseen, unknown flower.



## CHAPTER XV.

### A FIERCE ENEMY SWOOPS DOWN.

While he was still hesitating after the tremors of this blissful experience, uncertain whether the effort to go were not too great, a hue and cry was raised at a distance, and Trinidad José came running to them for protection. His offence in naming his dog had been discovered by the Jefe Político, or, at least, by some of his men. A number of swashbucklers of the newly-arrived Third Battalion had met him on the road and resented the insult to their chief. They had set upon him violently, but he had been able to give them the slip through his acquaintance with a short cut across the fields.

“Even if I get off now, I shall never dare show myself outside the hacienda again,” he said.

“Then join me to-night at my rancho of Cruce Vivo,” Walter proposed to him. “I will give you some work to do up there that will be better, at



any rate, than hiding here. Meantime, stow yourself away, and I will deal with these pursuers."

Trinidad José took refuge in one of the corner pavilions above the great fish-pond, where he buried himself under the fruit. Some of the ribald soldiers immediately came rushing up the garden alleys. Walter rebuked them sternly, and Don Angel, a youth of hot spirit, whose ears the disturbance had also reached, arrived with a band of employees hastily mustered. The intruders upon this retired, but muttered impudently something about coming again. One said to another:

"Very pretty pickings such a place as this would make. My idea is that all these top swells ought to be laid under handsome contributions."

The times were growing troublous indeed, and it were well if the General were home again. He returned, in fact, within two or three days, and his manner disclosed no small uneasiness. He was a man rather slow to action and far better adapted for the peaceful arts of civilized life than for the turmoil of a revolutionary period. Himself upright and honorable, no very ardent admirer of the present administration, and yet, on the other hand, by no means ready to countenance the pretensions of the so-called Liberator, he had perhaps perse-



vered in a policy of inaction much too long. He confided to his wife that he had been met only by an offensive rebuff by the ruling powers at Mexico, no employment had been offered him, and he had come back alarmed even as to his own safety. He had adopted a resolution on the way home. To Amy he said :

“I will not conceal from you that this is no ordinary crisis. Nor is the trouble likely to be soon over. I should not be doing my duty either to you or your family if I allowed you to be subject to any danger. I propose to take my family to Jalapa to remain quietly away from the centre of the disturbances. Then I will return to defend the hacienda. Angel, who is a brave boy, will take care of it meantime. We must set out at once.”

“Whatever you think is best, General. I am quite willing to go to Jalapa.”

“Oh, no ; I was coming to the point. The disturbances may break out there too. I have been obliged to make another plan for you. The American minister is to sail from Vera Cruz immediately with a number of families who are fleeing from the country, and I have arranged to place you also under his charge. We will meet him at the railway junction of Apizaco. There is no immediate cause



for alarm, you know," he said, soothingly, "but we shall do well to make all possible speed while things are still quiet."

But to the family he spoke much more frankly. He told how the dread insurgent chief Socorro Reyes had broken out again in the State of Michoacan, and Nuñez in the Canton of Tepic. The British man-of-war *Amethyst* had landed troops to save Colima from a forced loan imposed upon it by brigands. The mayor-domo of a large hacienda on the Plains of Apam had pronounced with about a hundred men, and been cut to pieces by the government troops. On the other hand, a government force of twice the same number had been massacred by the Indian population of Guerrero.

"There is a growing conviction," he said, "that most of this is in the interest of a noted revolutionist about to return from his exile at New Orleans. Some even think he is in the country already."

His words at first caused astonishment and dismay in the household, but this soon came to an end. In countries where armed strife is frequent, women and children are often quiet and self-contained even under fire. The hacienda was also put in its best state of defence. "Jalapa is a



charming place—such a fresh green landscape,” said the *Madre*, cheerfully, trying hard to be reconciled, “and the women are so pretty. ‘*Las Jalapeñas son halaguëñas,*’” repeating a proverb meaning that the maids and dames of Jalapa are an unusually captivating race.

“Yes, we have some cousins there, and it will be very nice,” added Luz.

“Nothing can ever be so charming to me as Las Delicias,” said Amy, with a sigh.

The news of their preparations was brought to the Jefe Político, and he gathered a band to stop their departure. As often happens in revolutionary countries, he seized upon the political troubles as an opportunity to gratify his private malice. Events had moved rapidly in the past few days. Señor Corcovedo also had his special intelligence from Mexico. An unusual force was now placed at his disposal to keep his district quiet, and he assumed dictatorial powers. He was sustained at the capital by two persons high in authority, whose creature he was. They were no friends of General del Prado, and doubtless he took his cue from them.

While on his road he was met by Pablo, who had been engaged in various odd jobs in his service



since leaving that of Walter, and who now besought an interview.

"Well, be quick about it; don't mumble your head off," said the Jefe, offensively.

"I was right in what I told you before: Don Walter Arroyo is not at the Norte: he is in this country. He is very bold about it, too, and I have just seen him."

"Have you, indeed? remarkable, isn't it, considering he returned by the steamer some days ago," indulging in a sarcasm which was very rare for him.

The informant was quite chapfallen at this. "I have been up the pass for some time," said he, "and I didn't know what was going on here."

"No, I'll warrant you didn't, nor anywhere else either. Awhile ago you told me you had seen a peon you suspected to be Don Walter. At the same time another of my men had heard a peon who seemed to be something more than a peon talking with Doña Beatriz. Between you, you made out that it must be the same one. I set a watch for him on your recommendation at Doña Beatriz's house, but he has not turned up there. If you can tell me anything useful about that mysterious person, and where and when he is going to dig up the nuns'



treasure, go ahead, in God's name. If you can't, be off with you before I warm you with this whip. Don't give me any more prophecies of Peregrullo."

He half raised his whip, but relenting, went on :

"What a fine pair you were, anyway, to let your interesting individual give you the slip and vanish out of sight entirely, while you took time to refresh yourselves and bring back the news of his presence to me!"

"It was the earthquake, your most exalted Excellency, that broke up everything. The man seemed to be swallowed up in it, and we were all terribly alarmed, because it was the worst known in many years."

"Am I one to be talked to of your alarms—I to whom fear is absolutely unknown?"

"I don't know how it is, but somehow I still think I was right about him."

"About whom?"

"Don Walter. He's coming down the mountain now with a lot of men carrying off heaven only knows what, though he will probably affect not to belong to them."

"What is all this to me, you? What have I to do with your Don Walter or Don devil, anyway?"



"He is a man who ridicules your Excellency," responded Pablo, artfully, seeking a sting.

"*Caramba!* I am not a person to be ridiculed, and I have noticed the young sprig is much given to ridiculing people. Well, then, what do you say he is carrying off?"

"Being on the mountain again, with my eyes about me, a few days ago, I saw Don Walter come up with Trinidad José. I had followed them to Cruce Vivo, and thence to the Barranca of Cimarón. I had much difficulty, on account of many men who seemed to be on guard, but still I had an opportunity to see that some mysterious operations were going on at the Barranca. Numerous persons came up carrying heavy bags. I managed to mingle with them at El Jasmin, and found that they were the same ones that had been engaged in the procession. They had brought back the statues, and they now pretend that there is a scarcity of provisions at Rio Frio, and they embrace the chance to carry there what is needed. But it is my opinion that this is only a blind and they are taking away something valuable from the Barranca."

"But you have told me yourself the Barranca is an utterly disagreeable, useless place. It is because he forced you to go there that you hate him."



"Yes ; but I have sometimes thought since that he might have found something worth while in it."

"Then why the devil didn't you go down and see?"

"The Yellow Snake is very unlucky, your illustrious Excellency."

"Ah, bah ! Well, I'll take a look into the baggage of these worthies—at your risk, do you understand ; if I find you've been deceiving me it will be worse for you. Just now, you observe, I have other things to do."

"But they are only just behind me. I hurried on in advance to warn you. They may get off with their plunder if you do not look well to it."

At the junction of the main road with that to Las Delicias and the mountain-path lay a group of roofless buildings, the vestiges of a country-house ruined in former wars. Fortunately for Señor Corcovedo, who could not fully make up his mind to change his plan of going to play the ruffian and tyrant at the hacienda, the small cortége of the Del Prado family was approaching, and already near this point. Corcovedo drew up his force across the road and intercepted them.

Almost at the same moment Captain Perez dashed up, on his way to rejoin Walter. This was



the first semblance of danger he had yet fallen in with, but he felt it might have been much worse when he came to learn the intention of the Jefe Político. Though he had no great interest in General del Prado, he had not a little in Amy on Walter's account. With an insinuating, politic way he well knew how to employ at need, he begged to offer his mediation, but this Señor Corcovedo brusquely rejected.

"I demand your passport," he had said, roughly, to the General, on halting him.

"My passport? What need have I of a passport, who am so well known to you?"

"I have received orders that all persons traveling without passports are to be arrested, and the laws concerning conspiracy applied to them."

"Such a law was indeed talked of while I was at Mexico, but it has never been published here. In any event, such laws are not for me," rejoined the General, haughtily.

"We will see about that. I will hold you as my prisoner for attempting to leave the district without authority."

With what ineffable contempt the lustrous orbs of Señorita Luz blazed at this man who had once aspired to call himself her lover!



"But *I* am an American citizen, and General del Prado has only set out to place me under the protection of the minister of my country. I demand that we shall not be interrupted," interposed Amy, astonished at her own temerity.

"Oh, very well; I have no means of knowing about that, but I suppose we may take your word for it," responded the Jefe, sneeringly. "You may go on by yourself."

But now the head of an irregular column of market-people was seen coming down the mountain-path. There seemed an unusual number of women among them, dressed in the Egyptian-like blue *re-boso* and skirt. The foremost ones came swiftly on, making little of their burdens, as their way is, and the soldiers opened slightly to let them pass through. Don Walter appeared riding only as if with and not of them. The real and false market-people were mingled together.

A whistle was heard, and nearly all stopped where they were. No great number had yet come in sight. Captain Perez dreaded the ill effect on Walter of the situation of affairs, and he pushed over toward him to counsel prudence.

"Surely there can be no reason for detaining or annoying these friends from the hacienda of Las



Delicias," said Walter to the Jefe; "there must be some mistake here."

"Oh, of course we shall account for it to you at leisure. Meanwhile, you are my prisoner too," presenting a revolver at his head.

"I your prisoner?" he returned, calmly, thrilled through every fibre with a sense of the danger, yet desirous to retain his utmost coolness on account of the vastness of the interests at stake; "and pray on what account?"

"You are charged with converting the public domain to your own use, and I demand an account of what your followers here are taking away."

He had signalled to a part of his men to guard the first prisoners, and to the rest to close up around himself. The two groups were not a little mixed together. At the sight of the pistol aimed at Walter, Amy Colebrook, whose anxious eye had been upon all this, was so wrought upon by an intensity of dread, that she gave utterance to a most piercing feminine shriek. She saw not only the present danger of her hero, but the ruin impending over his grand project. So penetrated with exquisite agony was this shriek, so vivid and startling, that it irresistibly drew the attention of everyone.



In this instant of diversion, while the eyes of the Jefe Político unwittingly turned with the rest, a figure which appeared to be a woman, but was in reality Trinidad José, sprang swiftly upon him, caught his extended arm, and dragged him down from the saddle. Captain Perez at the same time made his broad-breasted charger wheel and plunge roughly among the crowd, and cried, in a stentorian voice—

“A mistake! a mistake! Stand back! do not fire! Some mistake is here!”

“Pin him, Corcovedo! pin him, boy!” called Trinidad José; and the dog devoted himself with a gusto to helping at last a sweet, long-deferred vengeance.

The men, disorganized by the fall of their chief and the cry of Perez, knew not at first what to do. But they were regulars, and soon recovered their equanimity. They fired at José and his dog—though both miraculously escaped unhurt—set the Jefe again on his horse, then formed in good order and sent a telling volley after the scattering peasants. They began to follow them, but soon realizing that discretion was the better part of valor, they retired to the ruined country-house, still keeping the Del Prado family as prisoners.



A loud, shrill call summoned into sight a much larger force of the peasants. Those in disguise threw off their women's costumes, and all prepared for the attack. In the *mêlée* some shouts for the Liberator had inadvertently been raised; the war-cry was thus heard, and the movement identified henceforth with that of the revolution.

"The campaign has begun," commented Perez, philosophically. "Very well, it can't be helped; we are in for it, and we'll take the consequences."

It was clearly necessary, in the sequel, that they should retreat, but they determined first to cripple the enemy, to prevent a too speedy pursuit. Still more important in Walter's eyes was the rescuing of the prisoners. A plan of attack was quickly arranged: one body was to advance along the road, another to make a feint in flank, while a third should steal round under cover of a thick field of bananas and take the enemy in the rear. But these latter were no novices in this kind of warfare, and, as without the help of artillery every adobe wall may become a redoubt, they stoutly held their own. It was not till another force, under young Don Angel—who had been notified at the hacienda of what was going on—came hurrying and yelling across the fields that they finally gave up. They



broke from their intrenchments and fled in wild confusion, with much loss.

Amy Colebrook had a brief glimpse of Walter under a guise in which it is rarely given to women to see their heroes. She hardly knew him, and was almost afraid of him. The rage of battle was still upon him, he was bleeding from a slight bullet-wound across the cheek, and a revolver smoked in his hand. He was bursting in a gate, at the head of a storming-party, when the enemy took to flight.

But this in no way interfered with his affectionate consideration for her. He was inclined to retire from view, as if his appearance were an offence against etiquette. He quickly detailed Captain Perez to guard the General's party to Rio Frio, leaving him, Don Walter, to his own resources. Perez strongly expostulated at this, but the other would not be gainsaid.

"Go at once!" insisted Walter, almost imperiously. "They must be conveyed to a place of safety. Now that they are supposed to be identified with the insurrection, there is no telling what penalties they would suffer if captured. You are light, and can keep the start you have got."

"And you?"



“We shall retire up the pass again to the Barranca, and go out again by Lake Jornada. Be sure you see we have some boats and what aid you can spare available there. I shall contest every inch of the way if necessary, but we know our route better than they do now, and, heavily loaded as we are, no other would be possible.”

Meanwhile, all the bells in the town pealed out a hoarse and jangling alarm, the shops and churches were closed, and good citizens barred their doors at the bursting of this sudden war-cloud.

The Jefe Político had been within an ace of capture himself; he certainly could not have escaped if his opponents had had but a little more time to follow. He was furious with rage, and choked with chagrin at the ignominious fate that had befallen him, and yet, inspired with a salutary dread, too, by the lesson he had received, he made none too active preparations to revenge himself.

But Pablo thrust under his nose some specimens from one of the bags of treasure let fall during the flight.

“See here,” said he, “this is the kind of stuff they pick up at the Barranca: it ought to be good



enough for us. Better give the nuns' treasure a rest for awhile."

From that moment it was no question either of pursuing General del Prado or of attacking—just yet—Las Delicias: he gathered his whole force and set out in hot chase after Don Walter, fired by the keenest zest for gain.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### FROM CAMPO FLORIDO TO LAKE JORNADA.

Corcovedo counted by a rapid pursuit, if not on capturing the fugitives, on forcing them to throw down their burdens, the securing of which was far more important for him. But Don Walter—pressing into the service, besides, all the mules he could lay hands on along the way—got an extraordinary speed out of his heavy-laden men. He hurled great rocks down into the path behind him, and covered his march with a small rear-guard which kept the enemy in continual dread of being ambuscaded.

The district was practically deserted, the native laborers having fled for fear of being seized for military duty; all doors in El Jasmin were tightly closed, only a few dogs came out and barked at the heels of the retreating warriors. At night the rain came down heavily, and they went on in a soaked and sodden condition, often knee-deep in mud, their fire-arms rusting even as they bore them.



At midnight, overcome with fatigue, they camped at some deserted huts, but next morning an ample breakfast and the renewed splendor of an unclouded sun restored their spirits.

Retreating in this masterly manner, it was not till the hamlet of Huetongo was reached that they were overtaken by the enemy, and even then only because Walter permitted it. He thought best to make a stand at this point, and he fortified himself by levelling some of the small houses and throwing a barricade across the entrance of the main street, from the fonda on one side to the parish church on the other. He felt the necessity of striking a blow and holding the adversaries severely in check, otherwise they would press too closely upon the expedition at the critical moment of entering the Barranca, which could not but have a disastrous effect.

Corcovedo advanced three times and was as often beaten back, and when he finally made himself master of the position—having at last adopted the policy of setting fire to the buildings and moving by slow and cautious approaches—he found it had been deserted some time before. Straight sticks simulating musket-barrels, and hats stuck upon twigs had been arranged to mislead him. So en-



raged was he at the deception and at his loss that he brutally despatched a few of Walter's wounded who had been left behind.

He came up with the retreating party anew at the borders of the Barranca. But, thanks to the stout defence at the breastworks, the greater part of the treasure was already at the bottom of the trail. Again a skilful rear-guard hotly contested the way. Here, too, a new subterfuge was employed. Mules with mock loads of treasure and loudly-tinkling bells were sent down by misleading paths, and also through the jungle along the edge of the chasm. These were eagerly followed, and served to distract attention from the real movements. The valiant rear-guard, directed by Walter, having accomplished all that was possible above, now plunged down the steep descent. They took refuge in nooks and crannies, and, aided by skilful sharp-shooting from below, still fired back with telling effect upon the aggressors. Now and then one on each side fell in his tracks. The enemy rolled down huge fragments of rock, as in some battle of the giants ; but these, after all, were more terrifying than dangerous.

The train was well on its way again along the bottom of the Barranca before Corcovedo's men



fairly entered it. As they formed and began to press forward, they were startled and given pause for awhile by a dire explosion. Walter had concentrated all his remaining explosives at a single point, and now fired the mine. Its effect was to remove the artificial dyke thrown up by the late earthquake and allow the boiling stream to rush in over its old bed once more. The accumulated treasure was now safely hidden from every human eye. Up to this last moment he had cherished a lingering hope of being able to take out a still further amount.

Pablo, for his part, stared round the cañon with greedy and fearful eye, but nothing was as it had been on the occasion of his visit with his master. The superstition of the Yellow Snake still held good with his companions, and it was only with great difficulty that some of them were urged forward. Those who had objected most strenuously were joined to a body of reinforcements which had come up and were sent to skirt along the margin of the Barranca. What with the difficulties of the ground and the caution inspired by the prowess of the pursued, the advance below was necessarily slow, but Corcovedo said, with savage glee :

“ We shall take them presently like rats in a trap.”



He counted on pushing them from behind while the co-operating force should cut them off on their exit in front. Walter, too, saw this danger, and he began to be weighed down by a heavy depression. His men had effected prodigies of valor, but as likely as not defeat and destruction finally awaited them. Then, too, all these desperate deeds had been done, these lives had been lost, and he felt that the treasure, even if saved, must be tinged for evermore as with the lurid stain of blood. But this mood was not of long duration; his indomitable courage reasserted itself. There was hope in the fact that the force above, making their way by a route which they opened for the first time, progressed at a slower rate than his own. He urged on his command yet faster, doubling and again tripling their pay as an inducement; but after awhile the enemy above disappeared from sight, and then the result was only a matter of conjecture. In this march fell at last poor Trinidad José; and his faithful dog, who had been the cause of so much amusement, having stayed behind, pining over his master's body, came to be despatched by a cruel blow from a sabre.

The cañon narrowed rapidly toward its termination. At this point, to which the mules were only



got with great difficulty, extended across a formidable natural mound or palisade. As Walter neared it, he feared every instant to see the heads of foes appear above it from the other side, but he was not yet intercepted. The barrier was an excellent place behind which to withstand an enemy either from within or without, but, naturally, could not be made available on both sides. He determined to hold it against the pursuers while awaiting the return of a reconnoitring-party sent out to look for the expected boats and aid from Captain Perez. Failing these, he would march on, and, if need were, perish on the shore of the lake.

From the top a scene of peculiar beauty and grandeur presented itself. The lake, in a great crater ring, formed perhaps by the same agencies that had rent the grim Barranca through the mountain, spread out from a desolate alkali-whitened shore in front to vast mountains beyond. A stepping-stone as it were to the mountains, rose a green table-land so high as to seem almost inaccessible, and among the peaks was one topped with snow, of which Walter had sometimes caught glimpses during his labors.

The lake was not an unbroken stretch of water, for, besides a little rocky island of conical form, it



had frequent expanses of the extraordinary growth known as *chinampas*, a kind of amphibious meadow more or less free from attachment to the bottom, and often so light as to be driven before the winds. Near the shore, irregular channels extended among them, connecting one open space with another.

The crack of rifles in a new attack of the pursuers had already begun when the searching-party returned. They brought back with them a gruff sort of individual in a fur cap, who proved to be an American named Barnley. He belonged to a command, chiefly composed of foreigners, which was secreted with the runaway Kaufmann in the mountains, waiting to take part in the expected uprising. Captain Perez had communicated with Kaufmann, who had detailed Barnley with perhaps a corporal's guard of men to assist in the matter of the boats. He had lately come down from the wind-swept mining gorges of Pachuca, where a fur cap was not out of place, and he chose to wear his just the same in the tropics also.

"A little time's been lost by my coming back with your men to see if you were the right parties," said he, "but that's better than making a mistake. You can have two *canoas*, one big one, pretty heavy and slow, the other small and medium fast,



but they'll carry you, and they were the best we could do in these times. This end of the lake is pretty well skinned of boats, and it has mighty few at any time : so I don't see how anyone's going to follow you."

"And yet we had no time to lose," rejoined Walter. "Hark ! there's the enemy's other division cheering now. They have heard the firing, and are probably coming down on us. We may be even now too late to escape them."

"They've got another division, have they ?"

"Yes, the principal one is above there."

"I'm glad to know that," said Barnley. "It would be mighty inconvenient for Kaufmann to have them come on him unawares after you've given them the slip. I'll tell you what I'll do : if you'll take care of these I'll agree to stop the others with my own squad. If I can get to the Cajones—the Boxes—in time, I can hold them as long as you please. The Cajones is the most elegant place to corner a company you don't want to bother you. As like as not those parties won't get here before to-morrow morning."

"But we cannot sacrifice you to our convenience."

"Oh, don't you be afraid about me. I know plenty of holes around there to hide in afterward."



Encouraged by the distant cheering of their friends, the pursuers made a new onset. There was another battle, many more lives were lost, but the rear-guard stood firm as before, and under cover of its defence and the gathering dusk Walter embarked with all his goods and chattels on the boats. There was no time now to think of unearthing any other treasure, and the portion he had buried on the shore was abandoned to wait till who could say what distant day in the dim future before it should see the light.

Snap! snap! from the pistols, and crack! crack! crack! from the rifles of the baffled Corcovedo, who was left in impotent rage on the darkening strand. The men, sheltering themselves behind the piled-up bags, plied their paddles with all speed.

The *canoes* were clumsy but capacious flat-boats of but a few inches' draught. When the night settled down, all lights were put out, that their whereabouts might not be disclosed to the enemy if by any chance they were followed. Walter remained in the last and heaviest of them, which was the post of danger. Toward midnight, when trying to get a little sleep in a low cabin amidships, he was aroused by a dull thud and all-pervading jar.



"The chinampas! the chinampas!" called out the alarmed voices of the watch.

The wind had changed and insensibly enclosed them in the clogging embrace of this strange vegetation. A hail from the smaller boat in advance, almost immediately after, showed that it had met with the same fate. They were not completely surrounded, and the men worked strenuously with long poles to free themselves, but all this could effect nothing.

The chinampas were formed of a nucleus of water-plants closely interwoven. Upon this a thin soil had formed by decomposition: the mud of the lake, washing over them in storms, and the dust blown by the winds, had added to it; then flowers, reeds, and grasses had sprung up; the thickness varied from a few inches to several feet, and below them was deep water.

Don Walter found himself condemned to pass the rest of the night listening to the frogs and watching the twinkling fire-flies in the marshes. He was like one in a nightmare, who feels the imperious need of straining every nerve for flight yet is benumbed and cannot raise hand or foot. Once a bluish flame danced on the high top of the small cone-shaped island of *La Copa* which lay in his



course. His fears made it seem some signal of the enemy, who he fancied had already got in his van, but he heard one of the men say it was only "the witches' fire," a kind of natural will-o'-the-wisp that often burned there and indicated a breeze in the morning.

When morning came, however, a gray mist hung for awhile over everything, which was a fortunate circumstance. Walter recalled the voyagers shut in amid the ice-floes of the Arctic. The boat was surrounded on three sides, but on the other were floating islands and irregular tongues and fragments, which, though numerous, still afforded prospect of escape. The men were got out and put in a kind of towing-harness, and a mule also was landed, for the surface was sometimes strong enough even to support grazing cattle and the native huts. But these assistants floundered painfully along—one of the men being only saved from sinking out of sight by the personal bravery of Walter—and very slow progress was made.

Meantime, the boats had been put in as good a state of defence as possible. Suddenly the fog lifted and showed that this were a precaution by no means thrown away, for the enemy were approaching. They had by some means secured three



bateaux of their own, besides a number of small boats. Their large craft could not approach closely. it is true, for the same reason that prevented Walter's progress, but no such limitation hindered the light *proas* and *chalupas*; these darted hither and thither at will.

Corcovedo disembarked on the chinampa a large force, in charge of experienced guides. His men avoided the weaker spots, screened themselves in the tall rushes, and, when they had come within range, even crawled on their hands and knees. Don Walter's foremost boat, making a desperate push under dread of impending capture, finally broke through her embarrassments and escaped in to the open lake. He signalled her not to attempt to render him assistance, but to look out for her own safety.

The combat could have only one possible issue. Adversaries swarmed on nearly all sides in the light boats, and those on the land presently sprang up and charged with fierce yells; they entered at the bow, the stern, and amidships, all at the same moment. If thrown back, they were driven on again by the swords of their leaders, whom a taste of the treasure had made like ravening wolves. So this strange combat raged in the marshes, and many men fell in death among the



fragrant flowers through which they had crawled in their energy of pursuit. Don Walter recognized some of the very men, of the Third Battalion of the Line, who had made the insolent foray into the garden the day he was with Amy. Pablo drew himself stealthily to his feet, among the bodies on the deck, and attempted to stab him, but was cut down in the act, and thus that revengeful servitor finally met his end.

When the young commander saw that no further shred of hope remained, he caused a white flag to be raised on an oar from behind a portion of the cabin which he had kept clear as a last refuge. Having taken this step in the hope of preventing the effusion of more blood, he himself, as in supreme despair, plunged overboard.

The victors waited for him to come up, with pieces at their shoulders ready to fire. But he did not reappear at all, and they made up their minds that in the disappointment of his utter overthrow he had put an end to himself.

Don Walter, however, a powerful swimmer, having dived beneath the surface, had remained there so long a time that he was all but bursting, and then came up among the sedges on the border of a piece of the *terra infirma* many rods away. He



presented but the merest fraction of his visage to the upper air, and even then shots were being fired in his direction in an experimental way.

When his lungs were full once more, he dived again, this time with an original, almost incredible, plan. It was his purpose to swim directly beneath the chinampa, as legend related that bandits had sometimes done when pursued after their attacks on commerce in similar lakes.

It was naturally an undertaking full of great peril. He propelled himself swiftly through the dark and murky waters; vine-like tendrils and roots reaching nearly to the bottom caught him and impeded his progress; above could be dimly made out convoluted masses like the Gorgon's snaky locks. On first rising, he had miscalculated his distance: his head touched something viscid and trammelling. Consciousness grew vague; surely now the end had come—and so he had ended thus! the terrible drumming in his temples grew fainter, the suffocation less painful; his motions were weak. And then, and then—with gasps that seemed as if they must rend a human frame asunder, he breathed again; he no longer strangled; he saw the dear sun: never had he thought to look upon it more.



Lilies yellow and white, scarlet poppies, and the scarlet water-pepper spangled the surface on which he dragged himself out to rest his weary limbs, and the broken spaces of water reflecting the blue sky contrasted tenderly with the soft green of the vegetation: how could heaven ever permit lust of gold, suffering and slaughter, in so smiling a prospect?

When Don Walter was finally received on board the remaining boat, he was more like one from the dead than a living man. They had been about to turn away and abandon the scene, believing not a soul had escaped, when he came swimming and hailing them, a long distance out from the so-called land.

This boat, commanded by Antonio Gassol, had also a consort. Perez in person had come out with another boat, of small size, and containing few men, but these were all that could be spared from Rio Frio. They put in to the little island of *La Copa*, a solid granite rock containing a cup-like crater. The enemy could be seen transferring the bags of gold and their prisoners to one of their craft, leaving their unwieldy prize where it lay. Perez was for abandoning what they had lost, great as it was, and retreating to save what still remained to them.



"I regret it beyond measure," said he, "and I am the last man in the world to give it up while a single chance offers, but I bow to the inevitable, and there is not a thing we can do."

"No, no! I will never give it up! I cannot give it up!" cried Walter, in an agony of protest. "It is easy for you to advise, you who have nothing at stake. I will die first! it is my life; it is my soul! Oh, why did I not die when I was so very near to death?"

He wished to fortify the island and await attack there till Kaufmann could be communicated with in the mountains and brought to join them in an offensive movement.

"They will not attack us," said Perez. "In my opinion, they will go down the lake, content for the present with what they have, and will take no more risks upon it."

All the indications seemed to confirm what he said. The hamlet at the foot of the rocky peak was a peaceful place, with a couple of ancient palm-trees growing beside its small church, and the water off the shore deep and clear. Its principal industry was the making of mats from the rushes of the lake. Walter saw an Indian girl go in a *chalupa* and deposit some of these in a *canoa*—of a



much swifter build than most of its class—already partly loaded with them. Instantly a daring new conception flashed into his craving mind.

“Let us lure them on,” he proposed to Perez—“tempt them with the prospect of getting the rest of the treasure also. You and Gassol must pretend to fly and draw the others after you, and I in the swift boat will play the lame duck with Corcovedo and then fall upon him by surprise and capture him.”

“They will see through the trick,” rejoined Perez: “they won’t be taken in by it.”

He gave in his adhesion, however, to a plan of which he disapproved, and prepared to carry out his part in it with a kind of gloomy cheerfulness. He was right in his predictions. Corcovedo, flushed with victory, was in fact drawn after them by the surprising spectacle of the much weaker party awkwardly coming out as if to attack him. He baffled them by keeping his small flotilla well together, however, and then they had really to fly.

At nightfall, wholly discomfited, they reached the landing-place from which they were to start for Rio Frio.

But under cover of the dark night Walter made one last desperate unheard-of attempt. With a



picked crew, who could hardly have known how mad their enterprise was, and rowing with muffled oars, he pulled away and found Corcovedo's bateau at some distance from the others. He fell upon it with such valor and fury, born of his despair, that nothing could stand before him. In the uncertainty as to whom it was they had to deal with, the other boats fell into a panic and were unable to render any assistance. Don Walter, scarcely able himself to credit so great a good fortune, found himself once more the master of all his treasures, together with the prisoners who had been taken. No wild, unreasonable enterprise was ever crowned with happier success.

Señor Corcovedo—unless drowned in the attempt—had escaped to one of the remaining craft.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LAST CAMPAIGN.

The tragic hostility drawn out by Don Walter's expedition had precipitated the revolution. The hour had struck at Rio Frio, the *pronunciamiento* had been issued, and the populace had ranged themselves for the struggle. It was an extraordinary proof of friendship for Walter on Perez's part to have absented himself from affairs of the greatest moment at such a time, but he was found with his hands trebly full to compensate for it.

"I had hoped to accompany you part of the way," he said, "but that will now be impossible. There is not, however, the least need of it. You have developed the true military instinct: it is you who ought to lead, and I to follow."

He had in his head an idea of a sort of Prætorian guard, of foreigners — Kaufmann's force might be the nucleus of it—which should support the Liberator when he was fairly established, to serve as a solid alliance against the instability of



his own countrymen, and he proposed to Walter a high command in it.

"No, no," responded the younger man: "all that I have done has been only a desperate sort of invention inspired by my necessities. It is not likely I could repeat it in any other cause. I should have no stomach for military life as a profession."

"Well, well, everybody to his taste."

The arrangements with Captain Carvajal had been successfully made. It was expected that Carvajal himself would be met near Puebla, and from there he would send with them an accredited agent of his own to put them in possession of the vessel, to which a swift messenger had already been despatched with orders. General del Prado and his party had safely reached Rio Frio under the guidance of Perez, and after but brief delay had continued on their journey. Perez said that the General had shown himself much enraged at his involuntary identification with the revolution.

"It was really a pretty good joke on the old fellow," he said, laughing. "Oh, he was very abusive and insulting about it. He was even disposed to refuse the safe-conduct I offered him. 'I will not join your cause; I am not of you; I want



nothing to do with it,' he cried. 'Join whom or what you please,' answered I, 'but at present this young lady must meet her ambassador.' I think I should not have stood it so well had there been no one but himself; but of course everything had to be put up with for the young lady's sake."

"And how were they likely to get on the rest of the way?"

"First-rate: the road offered no danger then, though I should not like to promise as much now."

Walter's cavalcade was semi-attached to the train of a large military force moving toward the coast. It was surrounded with a peculiar consideration through the efforts of Perez. It was supposed, somehow, to be especially destined for the Liberator, whom the eyes of his partisans were every moment expecting in this part of the country. In any annoying or tedious situation it was only necessary to cry brusquely, "Arms for the General! Supplies for the General!" to have room promptly made for it and a commodious place opened to the front.

There were plenty of wild spirits in the command, however, upon whom it was necessary to keep an ever-vigilant eye. They would have been



glad at any moment to plunder the haciendas along the way, but such license must have resulted in disaster, and Walter repressed it with prudent severity. A hot fire of revolution began to flame up around the treasure-train as it proceeded. It had to be almost constantly in line of battle, for there was no telling at what point the danger would break out. Puebla had expelled its garrison and declared for the insurrection; Tlaxcala was in a state of siege; and more or less successful revolt was heard all along the line as far as Orizaba and even Cordoba.

The lovely peak of Orizaba at length hove in sight, its snowy top showing above a rugged mass of rosy red amid a fertile green landscape. At the station of Esperanza, Walter overtook most unexpected friends. General del Prado had indeed got himself into trouble by his abusive tongue. It appeared that the enterprising Captain Carvajal had employed his leisure in a small operation on his own account. He had seized the railway train on one of its last downward trips, in spite of a semi-agreement between the contending parties that it should be exempt from capture, and held the passengers for ransom. Most of them were let go, but General del Prado and his party were held—



the General acting upon the theory that even the reticence of common prudence in his talk would be construed as acquiescing in his apparent treachery.

It required but a word from Walter to Carvajal, in the peculiar relation in which they now stood to each other, to have them released. It was not yet too late: the American minister had not sailed, and they were sent on to him with some apologies and a strong escort to Cordoba. He was awaiting at that pleasant town, situated on high ground about the dangerous heats of the *Tierra Caliente*, the departure of the steamer.

Amy had again but a brief glimpse of Walter. She saw him, resolute, marshal-looking, leading his men, and was impressed to the utmost with a sense of her own feebleness at the sight of that strong masculine energy. Ever since they had parted in the garden she had been thinking, thinking, thinking. Was she to go back to New York and sum up, as the result of it all, simply that she had been kissed by a handsome man in Mexico? She tingled with shame and blushed with pleasure at the same moment.

"Did he kiss me as men will kiss almost any silly girl who will let them?" she demanded of



herself, "or can I expect—expect—— Surely he is too honorable to have treated me so, unless he meant to express a tender affection."

As to Don Walter, a sort of sternness had settled upon him, as a result of his incessant battles, labors, and hair-breadth escapes, and he had at the moment little earnest thought for anything outside of his project. So great were the difficulties that had risen all around him, and so great those that might easily yet remain, that he thought it impossible he should ever get out of the country with his gold. It was like a presentiment. He knew he should be stopped, if even at the last moment, and wrecked as it were in port. He only said, at parting, "If anything should happen to me—if I should never come back——" but, seeing her face blanch, "What nonsense! we shall meet very soon in New York."

What real warrant had he for such uneasiness, now that he was so near the coast? The most definite one he could formulate was that his men, finding he delivered no supplies and had no connection with any real strategic movement, might at last divine the truth, and fall upon him to despoil him of his treasure. What meant the evasive uncanny look he thought he surprised sometimes in the eyes of Antonio Gassol? Treason had no part



in the expedition thus far. Surely Gassol, the trusty lieutenant and efficient helper, had not learned the secret and begun to cherish thoughts of playing him false?

As to supplies, why should they not appear to be delivered on shipboard, to be used in operations along the coast? He soon showed, in fact, an order from the *Liberator* to this effect, procured for him by the good offices of Perez and brought by a courier. This was offered as his reason for separating from the expeditionary troops. These latter were to bide awhile at Cordoba, to await the result of some Machiavellian schemes which had for their object the opening of the gates of Vera Cruz, which still adhered to the government. Naturally, Walter could not enter Vera Cruz with them even if the bargain were successful; for what he carried was not of a sort to pass the eyes of the custom-house officers, and one set of custom-house officers was certain to be succeeded by another.

The mule-bells of his winding train tinkled through dark tropical forests that inspired reflection and awe, amid plantations of coffee and pineapple, beneath rich parasitic growths of orchid and bromelia, and post-hamlets, with monumental decayed churches, where Indian women with trays of fruit



on their heads, ignorant of the wars, gave them smiling greeting. The second day after separating from the troops, they came to a small river, which they crossed by means of a basket suspended on a raw-hide cable, the animals swimming. Farther up could be seen an ingenious boldly-arched foot-bridge made of grape-vines swung from tree to tree. At this place they heard some heavy cannon-shots from the direction of Vera Cruz, to the northward of which they had taken their course. They at first thought the city might have been attacked, but the firing was of too short duration.

Antonio Gassol acted in an odd way at the river, seeming, in Walter's nervous fancy, to keep back on the rearward bank with a number of the laden mules, while all the rest went forward. The young commander felt that his suspicions were highly unjust, but broke up, notwithstanding, any possible project of this kind. He was also warned by the agent of Carvajal of some peculiar doings; and he happened upon Gassol in a little group of men conferring earnestly, who slunk away at sight of him almost as if detected in something guilty. They seemed to be chiefly those who had been held as prisoners at Lake Jornada, and who might thus have discovered the real contents of the bags; yet, if they



had done so, why had there been no evidence of it before? After this his nervous dread grew upon him, and he surprised himself repeating the motto, "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not now, yet it will come." But there was nothing he could do, save to redouble his circumspection and diligence, and he endeavored to conduct himself in all respects just as usual.

He sent Carvajal's lieutenant and two of his own men to look out for the schooner, and if possible have her in readiness against his arrival. Pray heaven there had been no "norther" to blow her off the coast, he murmured. By great good fortune, they found her. The lieutenant boarded her, and came ashore again with some of the sailors, and the men returned to say that she was standing off and on along the shore, ready to respond to their wishes.

That night, which was to be his final one in Mexico, he retired late. He could have slept but a little while—it seemed to him, so full of cares was he, that he had not slept at all—when he was suddenly awakened by the loud, discordant cry of a macaw in the branches over his head.

There were shadowy forms of men lurking in the background, and Antonio Gassol had been standing beside him with a *machete*, ready to strike.



Don Walter had set up his camp-bed under a hastily-formed shelter of branches, near the piled-up treasure, and in close proximity were some of the sailors from the schooner. He had never anticipated any personal harm, but only at most that some of the animals might be run off with their precious burdens ; but now he awoke to confront bold murder.

The sudden cry of the macaw, as if a providential note of interposition, had unsteadied the hand of the assassin for an instant, and in this brief instant again Walter found his opportunity. Catching the central support of his cot, already somewhat rickety from hard campaigning, he brought the whole to the ground, throwing himself with all his force at the same time to the outer side. The blow had therefore to descend a much longer distance than calculated, and so miscarried. A second blow was resisted by muffling blankets, and resulted only in a flesh-wound on his shoulder, and before a third could be aimed Walter was on his feet with his revolver in his hand.

The would-be assassin escaped the shot, and ran through the camp, rallying his compatriots after him, and all fled together to the deeper heart of the woods. They were but a small minority of



the force, the ringleaders having counted on winning over the rest after the first blows had been successfully struck and the advantage was apparent. The flight of Gassol would have ended the whole nefarious attempt, but that he was to receive aid from a most unexpected quarter.

What it was can best be explained by returning briefly to the fortunes of Amy Colebrook. She entered Vera Cruz just as the plot for its betrayal had broken out in some active manifestations among the lower class. This plot was to fail, however, through lacking the co-operation of the time-battered fortress of San Juan de Ulloa. The garrison, on their insulated rock in the roadstead, a mile or two from shore, mutinied according to the plan, but their efforts were baffled by the intrepidity of a single person, their commanding officer. He loaded a cannon with grape and discharged it into their ranks as they advanced upon him. Again and again they moved forward, but still he fired with telling effect. Then, disheartened at their losses, and unwilling to delay further, they took numerous boats lying at the landing-place, and pulled off to aid their friends in the town.

But the government adherents had gained courage from this apparent rebuff to deal vigorously



with the revolt around them. They were ready drawn up in force at the edge of the quay, and received the boats with a destructive fire. Some begged for quarter, and were taken, others foundered outright, and a few of those in the rear made off to the northward and succeeded in landing on the shore. As Amy's steamer sailed out of port, the fusillade of this combat was her last view of that country so blessed by the bounty of nature, but marred by the perversity of man.

The mutineers from the boats took to the woods, there, after a brief season of wandering, they encountered the band of Gassol, who, having happily made their acquaintance without coming to blows, proposed to them a new affair. Unscrupulous runagates as they were, they were readily taken by the promise it afforded.

It was very early in the morning. Don Walter, feeling it impolitic to give his men too much time for reflection, had summoned them to begin loading the boats even before the last stars had paled from the sky. A little creek afforded a favorable point of embarkation and shelter for the boats. At dawn all hands were actively engaged at work, watched over only by a small guard. In this supreme moment of deliverance arose perhaps a more immi-



nent peril than any that had yet been encountered. The confederates burst from the woods in superior force and charged with shouts that inspired dismay.

By what beneficent happening was it, however, that a small body of sailors, who had ascended the creek to recover a boat that had drifted a little way up with the tide, were just then on their return? They were in the thicket in such a way that it was possible for them to take the assailants at close quarters in both flank and rear. Their numbers were magnified by their concealment. Their wholly unexpected fire staggered the marauding ranks and stopped their progress. The men at the boats reformed behind trees, the mules, anything and everything that afforded a semblance of shelter, and the tables were quickly turned; the fierce assailants were scattered right and left, and forced to fly in wild confusion, leaving a large number of slain upon the ground.

Don Walter's heart sickened within him at the sight of dead bodies once more. Here lay many of those who had fought bravely for him at Huetongo, at the Barranca, and at the lake. There lay, riddled with balls, the disfigured corpse of Antonio Gassol. He could not but think that this man,



of a good natural disposition, had meant to be all that was faithful and honest in his mission, but he had fluttered like a moth into the candle, and succumbed to a temptation beyond the strength of his weak, human nature ; this fatal gold had drawn him on to madness and crime. For him, truly might the old tradition of ill-luck in the Yellow Snake have been deemed verified.

There was no occasion now for further delay. The glorious light of rosy morning filled the sky and flushed the sea that lay like a floor beneath it, giving to the latter tender tints of pink and green ; and amid all these opalescent hues glowed the milky-white sails of the schooner, gently swelled with a favoring breeze.

The violence of the winds and waves was yet to be encountered, it is true, but these were of little moment compared to the malevolence of men.

For well-nigh a month he was tossed hither and yon, was beset by all the obstacles by which winged craft, at the mercy of the great deep, may be detained. Then, at last, he sailed up the long, beautiful bay, between the minor cities on either hand, joined the illimitable perspective of masts, and was at New York.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MINTED GOLD.

New York, then, after unmeasured trials and tribulations—New York, to Don Walter, practically for the first time.

The tall buildings of lower Broadway, with their fantastic skylines, suggested again his Barranca of Cimarron. He recognized almost at once the gilded letters that spelled out the name of the bank of which his father had been president, and which had been the principal scene of the disgrace. Who that did not know could have conceived any connection between this edifice amid the thick bustle of the great thoroughfare of the metropolis, with its ornate façade, its polished mahogany, and plate-glass, and its affable officials behind the counters, who had done business ever since, no doubt, upon strictly honest principles, and the dark, half-ruined house at Rosales where his youth had been passed? His father had kept none of the embezzled funds for himself, it is true, but this



though often weakly urged by some as a palliation, was none to Walter. His rigid ideas of integrity told him that the money had gone in reckless speculations, of which others had had to take all the risks. Walter had first seen the name of the bank on some random old check-blank at Rosales, found in a worm-eaten cabinet that might almost have come down from the time of the Flood. A slight memorandum, retained from among his father's papers, had long been his constant companion. It had served a sort of fetich and stimulus, too, in his labors, and now furnished an indication where to begin his work of restitution. He secured eminent counsel, and the survivors and heirs of survivors of "The Great Ridgefield Defalcation" of years long gone by soon began to hear of legal measures, and to receive queries that set many hearts beating with hope and pleasure.

Walter's wound in the shoulder had been aggravated by the voyage, but he allowed neither this suffering nor any other diversion to draw him away from his main object till every necessary step had been taken. The gold was conveyed from the hold of the schooner to the United States Assay Office. The rude smelting it had received would not do for its final state, and it had to be subjected anew to



treatment. Pending this, however, certificates to a large amount of its value were issued, which could be used in the negotiations. At length, when every possible preliminary had been attended to, then, and then only, he succumbed to illness beyond his strength to resist. He would have had himself taken to a hospital, but the head of the law firm to which he had committed his affairs would by no means listen to this. He was impressed with admiration by a magnanimity far beyond that met with in the ordinary range of practice, and conveyed him to his own home instead, where, during a short but dangerous illness that followed, he was his only friend.

Walter Arroyo, now Ridgefield, seemed to make it a sad sort of luxury to keep away from Amy. He let her know of his arrival and of his safety, but nothing further. She was there in the same city, and he might go to her at any moment. If he went, it would be but for one purpose; and he did not wish to go till the money had been paid back to her family. But if he proposed to her now, would it not be exacting an unmanly advantage through some natural sense of obligation on her part? Surely his fancy was a little overwrought and morbid. He doubted whether the disgrace



could ever be got rid of, whether the name could ever be cleared of the stigma so long attached to it.

Then, too, one day he was greeted by a staggering blow : the entire sum he had brought had been used up in the payment of the debt. He seemed to have made some sort of miscalculation : he was apprised from the mint that a considerable portion of the metal had fallen below the standard roughly fixed upon it in his estimate. As a consequence, instead of having a liberal sum left to draw upon, after all the obligations were met, nothing would remain for himself. He proceeded at once to find a more modest abode, and took steps to procure employment in his profession as an engineer.

Nevertheless, for all his holding back, and for all his juggling with the dearest passion of his heart, he meant to see Amy, and was counting the very seconds till the moment arrived. An article appeared in one of the more temperate and dignified of the newspapers, giving some account of the whole affair. It was founded upon a statement by his counsel. That gentleman had only been kept from giving it to the press hitherto by Walter's express prohibition, but now at last he boldly disregarded this.

"I hold myself responsible," he said, warmly.



"I have done it, perhaps, even at the risk of a violation of confidence. Have you not been defeating your own end by the unostentatious course you have adopted, and by the obscurity in which you have chosen to shroud the source of the reimbursement even from all those who have enjoyed its benefits? The atonement ought to have as much publicity as the original scandal."

"But the terrible publicity of it," objected the young man, though he was more than half convinced that the other was right.

"Oh, these things very soon pass over, and just leave a good general effect behind," responded the lawyer, reassuringly.

"Those of our citizens who have reached middle life," said the newspaper in question, "will still recall the startling effect upon this community produced by the failure and flight of the late Randolph Ridgefield. The magnitude of the interests involved made it the most notable event of the kind in financial history, and it is doubtful if it has ever been surpassed, even with our larger way of doing things in these times. The unfortunate Randolph Ridgefield died in poverty in Mexico. His son, Walter Ridgefield, Esq., a young man of great ability and force of character, has meantime, by his



own unaided industry, acquired a large fortune in that country. He lately arrived here, and, we learn upon the best authority, has devoted not a part only, but the whole of it, to making good the losses occasioned by the transactions of his father. He has even employed the services of expert detectives to find out remote and obscure heirs, to be reached in no other way, that not the smallest fraction of the debt might remain uncanceled. Within the past few days most of the money has been paid out over the counters of the Excelsior Bank, where it was deposited with a peculiar fitness, as Randolph Ridgefield was at the head of this institution at the time of the disaster. Several touching and pleasant incidents are reported in connection with the settlement of these ancient claims. Perhaps the most interesting of all will prove to be the repayment of the numerous depositors of the old Ridgefield Savings Bank, the incidental collapse of which was one of the most painful features of the disaster. We may easily imagine the elation of the humble class of persons whose little all was swept away on that occasion to find their hard dollars restored to them. Many, no doubt, will find themselves raised from poverty and distress to comparative affluence.



“When we consider the great lapse of time, the absence of any legal responsibility on the part of the giver, and the vastness of the sum, a step of this kind cannot but arouse our warmest admiration. No completed evil can ever be wholly repaired, it is true; but rarely can there have been so near an approach to entire reparation as that we chronicle to-day. The proceeding will no doubt seem quixotic to that interesting class of our fellow-citizens who have betaken themselves just across the northern frontier and bid fair by their numbers and wealth to found there a new aristocracy based upon spoliation like that of mediæval barons, but we are free to confess that, in our view, no more generous action, and none more calculated to have an invigorating effect upon too lax notions of commercial morality, has been performed in our times.”

The day after this, there arrived for Walter, through his banker, a note from Amy, saying :

“Was it *you*, then? It seems too incredible. Will you not come, if only for a moment, to let me thank you for your great kindness?”

Then finally Walter went to the Bella Vista Flats, near the Park. The Bella Vista had on a small scale many of the external adornments of more costly and ambitious flats, with none of their



conveniences. Its rooms were small and many of them dark, the Colebrooks were high indeed in the air, and there was no elevator. Their rooms, too, showed some disorder.

"Do not look at anything," protested Amy. "We are moving already. We have danced, wept, and prayed with joy and gratitude over our good fortune, and are getting ready to reap the benefit of it without an instant's further loss of time."

Don Walter met her mother, and her younger sisters and an older one also, with all of whom he was well pleased, while they were inclined to look upon him as if he were a god but very thinly disguised, instead of a common mortal. He met, too, her friend Emily Winchester, the "Dear Emily" of the letters from Mexico, and the one who had charged herself with remailing his letters when he had pretended to be in New York. She also was rather pretty in her dark type, forming a considerable contrast to that of Amy. She went away very shortly, leaving behind for Amy an ever-so-slightly-meaning smile, at which the latter blushed very deeply, though there was no chance that Walter could have seen it.

He found it a little difficult to conceive of Amy apart from the bloom, the fragrance, the stately



terraces, and plashing fountains of Las Delicias, with which she seemed to be thoroughly identified: still, there was a new charm of domesticity about her in these surroundings.

"What a delight it is to me to see you again!" he exclaimed, with unavoidable enthusiasm, and taking her hand warmly. "Will you let me tell you how beautiful you are?"

"If you can be so wholly reckless of the truth."

"We have been through so much together, it seems as if we ought never to part again. How many other girls would have done for me all that you have done?"

"Some millions, I suppose."

"No, no; not one."

"But what is this dreadful story I hear about your having nothing left for yourself?"

"It is true. With the shrinkage at the Mint, the extraordinary expenses, the portion still left behind at Lake Jornada, and the smaller portion that in spite of us fell into the hands of the enemy, all is gone. The surplus I had counted upon has disappeared."

"No, no! I will not have it so! it is a shame!" protested Amy, indignantly. "I cannot answer even for the rest of the Colebrook family, who may



be inclined to selfishness—though they shall hear from me at once—but do you think I, who saw your hardships and your bravery, will take my share while you are in want? No, indeed: so much at least still remains to you.”

“It is no more than I might have expected from your generous heart, but I assure you honestly I do not miss the gold; I never really felt that it was mine, and when I think of all the blood and suffering that rest upon it, I am very certain I shall be better off without it.”

“Such unselfishness is not quite in human nature. Take care! I do not like people who are *too* unselfish; they are apt to die young. If you are not moderately human, I shall not approve of you.”

“Of course, if I had known how it was coming out, I might have made some different arrangement—perhaps have paid only a part of the interest; but what is done is done, and I am not sorry.”

“No, it is too wicked. I will not have it so.”

“You see, I come here and talk of my woes, in spite of the obvious suggestiveness of the thing,” pursued Walter, smiling. “There is just one way that occurs to me: we might share it—if you were willing.”



His hearer colored again most deeply, this time with the best of reason.

"After all, I do not feel poor," he continued, hopefully. "I shall be ridden by no more nightmare; I am a free man, I begin the world on even terms. If you thought well of the name of Ridgefield, now, I would like to say—I would like to tell you how very dearly I love you. Had you ever suspected it might be so?"

The tangles of her bright hair drifted against his temples, and her soft cheek rested, as once before, against his bronzed one that had known so many hardships.

"When you kissed me, in Mexico, I felt—I hoped—you were fond of me. But you tried me terribly, do you know?"

"Yes, yes, I must have done so. How can you forgive me?"

Letters came to them from Mexico. The good aunts Arroyo wrote to Walter, "You have a sweet bride; we remember her very well: you are fortunate in your marriage, and when peace is declared—for come some time it will—you must bring her here to see us, child of our hearts."

They wrote that the country was still torn by bitter strife, and neither of the great parties



seemed strong enough to put the other down. The star of Captain Perez, they said—their tone about him was not disrespectful now—was in the ascendant. He had risen more and more to prominence in the Liberator's forces, till he might be ranked as next in authority to the commander himself. The Jefe Político had been killed in a skirmish near the Barranca of Cimarron, over which district Perez had still maintained some supervision. The story recalled the fate of the ancient King William Rufus in the New Forest: his body had been found in the woods by a charcoal-burner. Walter fancied he divined the reason of the Jefe's presence there, and he breathed freer henceforth at the thought that this eager spirit was no longer to be feared as a prowler among the caves of the treasure.

Not long after their wedding-day there came a letter from Doña Beatriz, forwarded by an intermediary. She was dead. And her end, according to the report of Sister Praxedis, had been very peaceful and edifying. The Señoritas Arroyo also wrote about her death, saying, "She was regardless of her health in the practice of her strict devotions. She fell ill just about the time the news of your marriage came."

Amy's eyes were moist with tears as she in her



turn read this letter. It was the brief, last message of one feeling that death was near. "I was not strong enough to withstand the temptations of this world," it read, "and in leaving it I have but one regret—that I may have been a stumbling-block and an evil influence in your path. If God in his infinite goodness should ever pardon my great transgression, I would pray that my happiness in heaven might be to hover over you with the warmth of a pure and hallowed affection, free from desire that you should ever know or return it, and to guard you from some pain or trouble that might otherwise come to you."

It read like a strain of mournful music. It was a cry of hapless love that had been its own destruction, an appeal to that life beyond where all the baffled hopes of this world may yet be made good.

"She loved you more than I," murmured Amy, sadly.

Now in due time came news that the political sky was brightening, and it began to seem probable that the treasure-beds in the Barranca of Cimarron and the gold left buried on the shores of Lake Jornada could once more be visited.

THE END.



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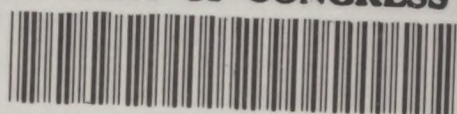








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